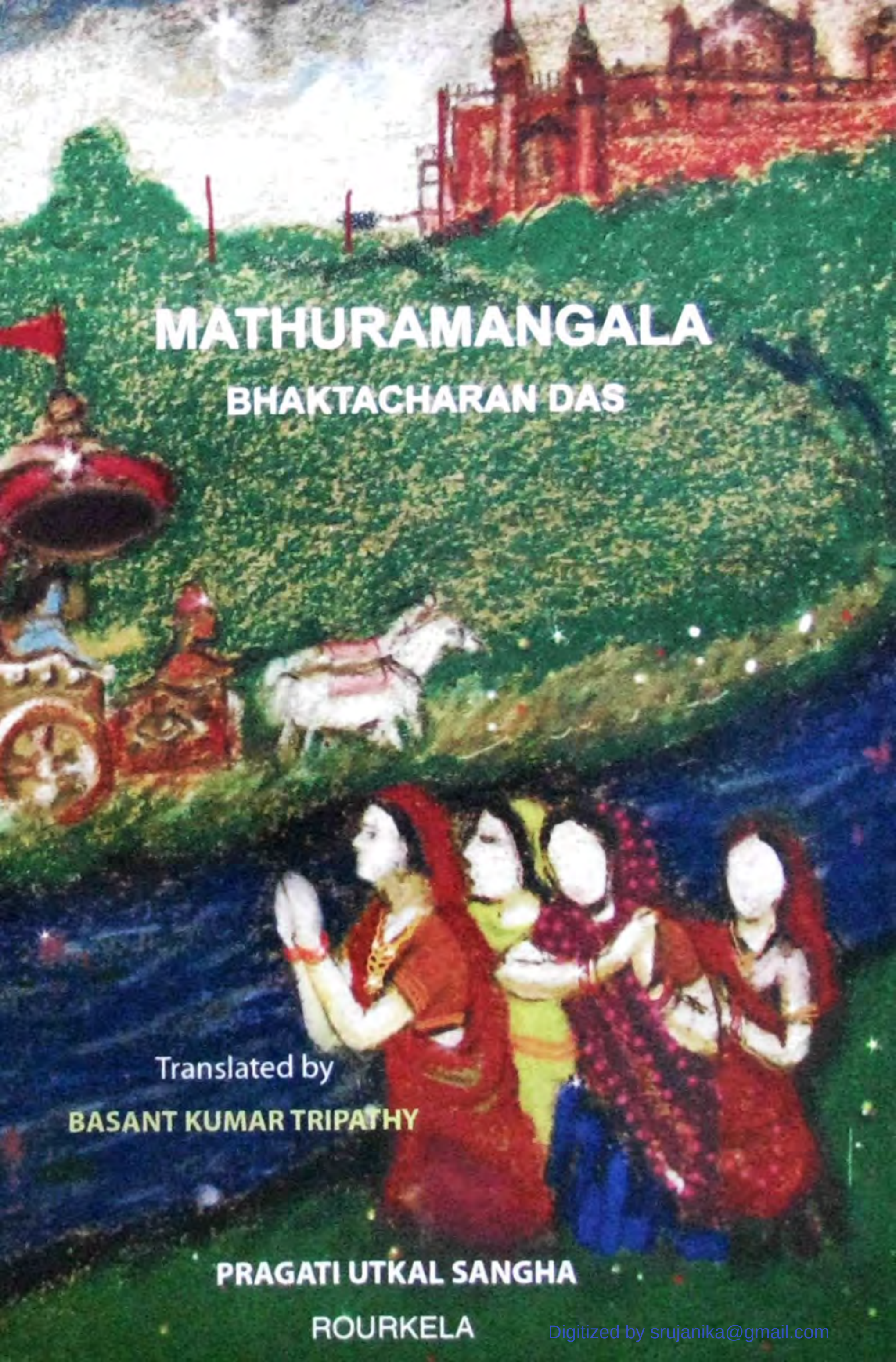

MATHURAMANGALA

BHAKTACHARAN DAS

Translated by

BASANT KUMAR TRIPATHY

PRAGATI UTKAL SANGHA

ROURKELA

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Published by
Pragati Utkal Sangha
Fakirmohan Nagar (Sector-7), Rourkela-769003 (Odisha)

1st. Edition : **2016**

Cover design
Samarjeet Behera

Printed at Ruby Printers, Cuttack-2
Price : ₹ 200/-

ISBN978-81-920552-7-5

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The Author

(1729-1813)

Born in 1729 CE at Sanapadara village of Khurdha, Odisha, Bhaktacharan Das was a great Vaisnavite poet of late 18th century. After his acceptance of Vaisnavism, he changed his original name Bairagicharan Pattanayak to Bhaktacharan. He lived a religious life, setting up *maths* at Khurdha, Banapur, Daspalla and Sunakhala. His literary contributions include *Mathuramangala*, *Manasiksha*, *Manabodha Chautisha* and *Kalakalebara Chautisha*. It is said he died in 1813 CE at the age of 84 at Puri while chanting the name of Hari.

Mathuramangala is considered a classic in medieval Odia literature.

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From the Publisher's Desk

Pragati Utkal Sangha, one of the oldest socio-cultural instituions of Rourkela, has been trying consistently for uplift of Odia language, literature and culture for a long period of 57 years on the strength of the inspiring ideals of Madhusudan Das, the great visionary Odisha has ever produced. In fact, we launched our initial drive selecting 1st April as the day of national celebration amidst fanfare. Such a non-official endeavour had its root way back in the year 1968 and gradually this has been followed in a routine manner in other urban and rural areas of Odisha. Over and above, our publication avowedly carries forward our effort in upholding various aims and objectives fundamental to the instituion.

Apart from bringing Madhu Babu's speeches and writings into limelight, we made sincere attempts to compile ancient Odia literature, including those which have not been published. On this occasion, it would be unfair, may be an act of ingratitude, unless I recount the selfless services of Prof. Debendra Kumar Dash, the life and soul behind all our publications.

This year, we are happy to offer our readers the English rendering of *Mathuramangala*, written by Bhaktacharan Das. It tells the story of Krishna's exodus to Mathura. Of about the two hundred *kavyas* written during the medieval period, this one claims to be the first to be printed in a complete book form, that too, with an excellent piece of introduction. The Vedantic concept of *Brahman* and Chaitanya's *Bhakti* cult are made to face each other in form a heated debate between Uddhaba and the gopis. This text, written in an ornate style, is a true representative of the Vaisnavite literature that reached its heights in Odisha in the 18th-19th century. We hope, its rendering into English will delight our readers all over the world. On this auspicious occasion I express my thanks to Prof. Basant Kumar Tripathy for accomplishing the arduous task of giving this text a new life through his translation. I also thank Dr. Urmishree Bedamatta for her outstanding introduction.

Nirod Kumar Samantaray

President, Pragati Utkal Sangha

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Foreword

Now if you asked me to sing a song I would most certainly pick up a *chhanda* or *chautisha* composed in the medieval period of Odia literature. For as a young boy I used to sing them regularly and my love for poetry was nourished by that exercise. Music was poetry and poetry music. The sounds of the words sent me into raptures; their meanings waited timidly in a place unknown to me.

In this context I fondly remember the *chhandas* VI and VII in *Mathuramangala*. In the former Yashoda is crying her heart out as her beloved son is about to leave for Mathura, and in the latter, the gopis behave as though they had lost control over themselves and their sorroundings. Their feelings are expressed in a language that not only captures, but also lends a dramatic intensity to the inner and outer realities of the present moment. The two *chhandas* are composed in two different *ragas*. But the words and rhythms are so familiar yet so strange, so spontaneous and natural yet so aesthetically convincing.

Mathuramangala occupies a unique position in Odia *Kavya* literature for its musical structure and its compact expression of a variety of feelings and emotions.

Basant's translation will go a long way in acquainting non-Odia readers with the riches of medieval Odia literature. I congratulate him and wish him all success.

Soubhagya Kumar Mishra
Independence Day, 2016

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Translator's Note

Bhaktacharan wrote during a period of time when medieval literature was at its most self-centred and self-sufficient stage of development. His literary works, *Mathuramangala* in particular, are authentic expressions of Vaisnavite belief of the late eighteenth century. With Krishna as a child-hero at the centre, *Mathuramangala* is full of ease and grace, so supple in its diction and imagery and so exciting in its richly coloured similies. It preaches the gospel of flesh verses spirit, good against evil until the deliverance of divine punishment to the mightiest on the earth.

To facilitate the understanding of the English readers and to save them from the trouble of cultural complexities, an exhaustive glossary is appended to the text. The brief note given at the start of each chapter with the mention of its raga is by me.

On the occasion of the publication of *Mathuramangala* I express my sincere gratitude to Prof. (Dr) Soubhagya Kumar Mishra, my teacher, for going through the manuscript in the most unsparing manner-as a good teacher always does-and making valuable suggestions. Special thanks for writing an excellent Foreword.

Since Urmishree won't like thanks, let me congratulate her on producing a clear and authoritative work, the Introduction.

My thanks are due to Pragati Utkal Sangha and Sri Debendra Kumar Dash, one of the most revered literary critics and editors of today, for taking active interest in the project and for their eternal love for Odia literature and Odia Nationality. I also thank Dr Sricharan Mohanty and Sri Manmath Pattanayak for co-ordinating the production work.

I would like to thank Sri Samarjeet Behera, an M.F.A from the University of Hyderabad, the artist-in-residence with Utsha Foundation (2015) and a freelance artist covering all branches of Fine Artsvand Sculpture, for designing the cover for our book.

Last but not least, I am thankful to Sri Bijoy Kumar Tripathy, Proprietor, Swarnet Valley, Dumuduma, Bhubaneswar for preparing the manuscript with skill and punctuality.

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INTRODUCTION

Urmishree Bedamatta

You're unfair Kanna, you're unfair! ...
Born as cowherd girls in a herder clan,
a humble state,
Our loneliness is death.

- Nammalvar, *Tiruvaymoli* 10.3.1-5

When Vishnu left his snake-bed to take shelter in Devaki's womb, those were the days. Away from the fiendish watch of his uncle Kamsa, the baby had been carried secretly by his father to the safe confines of Nanda's village Gopa. The mighty Yamuna, which was in spate in that dark hour, had then split herself to make way while the giant serpent Sheshnag, on which Vishnu used to rest, obliged by forming a hood to protect the child and his father from the incessant rain. Within a few days of birth, Vishnu, named Krishna, sucks the spirit out of the evil breast-giver Putana, slays the wretches Bakasura, Aghasura and Kubera's sons, cleanses the Kalindi of Kaliya and wolfs down the forest fire. A few years later, the boy lifts the grand Govardhan on the tip of his little finger to save his friends and the elders from a belligerent Indra. Amid all that, he steals butter from everyone's home and keeps his mother busy, gives himself to be bound by a rope, frolics with his friends and plays his flute causing the cowherd girls, the gopis, to pine and sigh. All of Gopa sings of him. There is no craving for anything other than or past Krishna. To be is to be with Krishna; without him, they are not.

Who or what is Krishna? In *Mathuramangala*, in the beginning, the poet quickly moves over the various forms (avatars, incarnations) of Vishnu. We come upon Krishna only through the experiences of various characters such as Yashoda, the gopis, Akrura, Kamsa and Uddhaba. Outside of our text, the earliest reference to Krishna is in *Chandogya Upanishad* (3.17.6, 6th c. B.C.) which describes him as a man[1], the son of Vasudeva and Devaki[2]. But, it was after that valiant moment in history when Krishna, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, explicitly declared himself as the highest Energy or supreme Self that the human mind was filled with abundant hope about the resplendence and opulence of the individual soul and the fullness that it could achieve[3].

I am the song in sacred lore
I am Indra, king of the gods;

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I am the mind of the senses,
the consciousness of creatures.
(Miller trans. "The Ninth Teaching" v. 21-22)

But the infinite form that Krishna had exhibited of his self before Arjuna was terrifying, in the least. Arjuna, who was by then overcome with devotion and empowered with detachment and knowledge, further sought the beauty of the supreme Self. It is perhaps this coda in the *Bhagavad Gita* that fired the imagination of poets, philosophers and saints, leading to the final form of the great *Srimad Bhagavatam* or *Bhagavata Purana* around the tenth century. This "paradigmatic devotional text," which "claims as its source and goal ecstatic union with Lord Krsna"[4] then became the *opus universale* for all locally stylised representations of the Krishna phenomenon.

Since then, at all times in history, where Krishna is concerned, the human mind has been at work trying to answer *kutas tvam?* (What's with you?)[5]. A great number of wise men and women, while trying to answer the question, have fallen silent or wept. However, as a result of this exercise, the history of Krishna begins to take shape as the history of ideas embedded in a complex mesh of philosophical, theological as well as secular humanist doctrines. In this doctrinal intermesh, it is *Krishnalila* and separation from Krishna which have most endeared to the Indian imagination. Reviewing two of the earliest modern day research studies on the Krishna phenomenon, Kinsley's *The Divine Player* (1979) and Friedhelm Hardy's *Viraha Bhakti* (1983), Siegel infers, "Play is "what's with" Krsna. His childhood games and pranks, all his larkish little /lîlâs, are but the worldly phases of the cosmic lîlâ of mâyâ" (390). Juxtaposed with Kinsley's exploration of the theme of *deus ludens* (Krishna as the embodiment of the play spirit) is Hardy's treatment of *bhakti* as the "religion of passionate love". Siegel then sums up the process by which a literary motif forms the basis of a new religion :

> With exquisite pain a young girl longs for her lover; the personal experience is conventionalized by poets, codified into the aesthetically beautiful anguish of love; the literary motif, in turn, is mythologized, ritualized, made the basis of a new religion, a religion of sweet sorrow and beatific love, of erotic devotion to Krsna. (391)

II

When our poet Bhaktacharan Das set out to write in early nineteenth century, there were in circulation a wide number of compositions, philosophical and poetic, on the subject of Krishna with varied theological and epistemological

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emphases[6]. While the *Bhagavata Purana* provides the subject matter for the text, the poetics of *Mathuramangala* derives its nature from the "theological aesthetics" (Roberts 1) of Rûpa Goswamin's *Bhaktirasâmrtasindhu*, an account of the primary *rasas* and concomitant sentiments which overwhelm a devotee of Krishna. It became a foundational text for the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement in Bengal in the sixteenth century. Another text of similar nature is Rûpa Goswamin's *Ujjwala Nilamani* which elaborates on *madhura rasa* as the chief of all *rasas* relished during the act of devotional service to Krishna. Of the context of *Bhaktirasâmrtasindhu* and the birth of a "new kind of religion" called Bhakti, Haberman says:

Although Kṛṣṇa devotionalism has had a long history in India, the kind of religion represented in the *Bhaktirasâmrtasindhu* has many new elements that arise in a unique historical moment. In many ways, the religion presented here is a full flowering of what Friedhelm Hardy calls "emotional Krsna bhakti." This form of religion focuses exclusively on Krsna as the supreme reality, and therefore might be distinguished from Vaisnavism, if this latter term is used to indicate that Krsna is an *avatâra* of Viṣṇu. This new form of religion is very much associated with *Bhâgavata Purâna*, which introduces passionate emotionalism into the world of intellectual Krsna bhakti, represented in such texts as the *Visnu Purâna*. ... At least since the time of Sridhara's commentary on the *Bhâgavata Purâna* in the thirteenth century, this text began to be understood as a presentation of the religious life as a relishing the Rasa of an emotional relationship with the Lord. What began in earlier ages in seminal form, reached full culmination in the *Bhaktirasâmrtasindhu*. (xxx-i)

Like all Krishna Kavya, *Mathuramangala* is a long lyrical poem full of sentiments. It has the power to lead the reader to forget the self and empathise with the actors' feelings, while partaking of multiple *rasabhava* (sentiments) such as sorrow, surprise, euphoria, anger, fear, devotion, affection, attachment, disgust and pleasure. Specially, the poem ends with a message about the unworthiness of any attempt at underestimating the phenomena of "sacralisation of [...] personal experience"[7]. The poem is divided into thirty cantos. Canto 1 delineates the purpose of God's appearance: Essentially formless, / You take many forms. / For the benefit of cattle and brahmins, / You descend to the earth. / You have no beginning, no middle, nor end. / You are Soul of all souls / And Motivator of all actions. The influence of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana* is all too obvious in these lines. The immediate purpose of Krishna's arrival is to rid the earth of Kamsa. In Canto 2, Akrura meets Krishna. A long textual tradition beginning from the *Brahma Samhita* (origin unknown) through the

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Bhagavad Gita to the *Bhagavata Purana* and Vilvamangala's *Krishna Karnamritam* (13th c.) becomes evident in Akrura's admiration of the near-feminine attributes and appearance of Krishna[8] and his reaction.

In ecstasy
He tried to embrace the sky,
His body shaking with passions of love.

Curls of hair on his forehead
Looked charming. His eyebrows were
Like Kama's bow, his eyes its arrows
And lines of collyrium
Touching his ears, its string.

Canto 3 sees Kamsa roaring. The episode is the smallest - a decision made by the poet in terms of structure, which is natural in a scheme that contains the Kamsa story as a frame in which to present a profound moment in the history of human consciousness – the split. Kamsa is every man, the deluded soul, always aware of the existence of the supreme Self, but because of his inability to ride over the dualities of the world, was spending his days in fear and anxiety. Krishna had to respond, to Kamsa, to all of Mathura, the world of all men and women. Akrura arrives in Gopa[9] in Canto 4 and then on till Canto 9, Gopa is in intense anguish, separated as it is going to be from Krishna. In Canto 10, Akrura rides away from Gopa with Krishna and Balaram in his chariot and is blessed with a vision of Krishna as Vishnu while taking a bath in the Yamuna. Krishna's arrival and his adventures in Mathura culminating in the slaying of Kamsa comprise the subject of Cantos 11 to 23. In Canto 24, Krishna is disturbed by an irresistible longing for the gopis' love. Uddhaba arrives in Gopa and meets Yashoda and the gopis in Cantos 25 and 26. The famous argument between the gopis and Uddhaba happens in Canto 27. This argument is a coda with an explanatory motif and originates in Krishna remembering the gopis. The poem began with an invocation of Krishna as the Supreme Being; it becomes a structural necessity to end with a coda that justifies the poet's call to chant the name of Krishna. The bee appears in this canto. In Canto 28, Uddhaba hands out Krishna's letter to the gopis which is read out by Radha. Krishna addresses each one of them directly in his letter because of which the gopis are "greatly relieved" and "quite pleased" and return to their houses. In Canto 29, the gopis request Radha to write a letter to Krishna. This canto exemplifies the Vaishnava aesthetic of life and living in a world without Krishna. One also finds an answer to the question "what sort of feelings or emotions" (Otto xi) it is by which the *gopi bhava* succeeds in presenting itself as the highest

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form of devotion that humanity can strive for. Canto 30 ends with the poet's message to the reader :

Have compassion on all living beings.
Chant Harekrishna day and night.
Give up lust, anger, greed, attachment,
Pride and intolerance,
The six enemies who stand in your way[10]

The narrative in each canto (called *chhânda* in the text), is written in a specific metre which is set to an appropriate râga (tune). These tunes and metres were popular devotional poetical metres of the time. The râgas include primary râgas, their branches, uparâgas and mixed râgas. The primary râgas are *Bangalashree* (cantos 3 and 19), *Barâḍi* (canto 6 in which Yashoda and the gopis are seen wailing and canto 17 in which Krishna breaks the Bow) and Kafi (cantos 12 (Kamsa plans an ambush), 15 (Rajaka is slain) and 21 in which Krishna kills Kubalaya and Chanura, Kamsa's most trusted lieutenants). The branches of the primary râgas are *Kaḷahamsakedâra* (canto 8 where Krishna consoles the gopis before his departure to Mathura) and *Panchamabarâḍi* (last canto). The mixed râgas are *Kedârakâmodi* (canto 16) *Kaḷyânaâhâri* (canto 13 in which Krishna goes around Mathura and canto 29), and *Âshâdhashukla* (canto 9 which depicts the gopis in a state of frenzy, canto 18 where Kamsa is terrified and canto 20 in which Krishna arrives at the Lion Gate of Mathura). Some râgas specific to the Odia tradition include *Deshâksha* for canto 23 in which Krishna restores order to Mathura and visits Kubuja's home. Some *uparâgas* such as *Kaḷusâvâni* (cantos 10, 24 and 26)[11] also feature in the composition. To name the metre and tune of some cantos, old *chautishas*, a form of poetry exclusive to Odia literature, such as *Madhupa Chautisha* (cantos 5 and 23), *Banabasa Chautisha* (canto 24) and *Biprasimha Chautishavâni* (canto 27), which perhaps were popular at the time, have been referred to.

The author of *Mathuramangala* Bhaktacharan Das is generally accepted to have lived during the large part of the eighteenth century and early 19th cent. (Artaballabh Mohanty says it is 1729 to 1813) and is of the view that *Mathuramangala* was composed between 1770-75. Mohanty in his preface to a 1951 edition of his commentary on *Mathuramangala* then goes on to cite Bhakta Charan's literary heritage. The multiple Odia sources which Bhaktacharan seems to have used for his composition apart from the Sanskrit *Bhagavatam*, *Brahmavaivarta Purana* and *Padma Purana* are the Odia *Bhagabata* by Jagannath Das, *Rasakallola* by Dinakrushna Dasa, the *Harivamsas* of Bipra Narayana and Achyutananda, compositions by Upendra Bhanja and *Prema Panchamruta* by Bhupati Pandit. The influences are directly felt in the distinctive Odia life-situations, expressions and

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interpretations in *Mathuramangala*. The poet, much like Upendra Bhanja, blends sanskritised and prakrit words. About Bhaktacharan's importance in the Odia literary lineage, Mansinha says he is more a learned than an "inspired" poet (*History*, 129). However, Bhaktacharan makes a significant addition to the legacy of Bhakti and reinvigorates the jnana-bhakti dialectic when, unlike in the Sanskrit *Bhagavatam* or in the Odia *Bhagavata*, the two primary influences, he makes Uddhaba get ready to abandon Krishna and be a part of the gopis' life and experiences.

Though written in the nineteenth century, *Mathuramangala* may be seen as a literary artefact within the frame of the medieval Gaudiya project of Braj reclamation and its enterprise of constructing an itinerary of Krishna pilgrimage. The project was inaugurated with Chaitanya's discovery of Vrindavan in early sixteenth century. Mathura, because of its ancient mythic association with Krishna's childhood, was an important region to be covered in this project. After Chaitanya discovered Vrindavan 'through the mind's eye' (see *Chaitanya Caritamrta*) around 1516 A.D., the areas in and around the place began to be glorified as *dham*, a sacred landscape which every Krishna devotee aspired to circumambulate. A few years later in 1552, an influential devotee of Chaitanya, Narayan Bhatt, "codified Krishna pilgrimage" in *Vraj Bhakti Vilasa*[12] in which he described Braj in terms of an "iconic landscape ideal" (Shah 56)[13], the maṇ dala. According to Shah the man dala

> ... serves as a focus of ritual worship in devotional practice and is the geometric symbol of the imaginary landscape of Krishna, which communicates Krishna's realm as a special place in the cosmos. Krishna stands in the center of the concentric circles surrounded by other figures of the Krishna myth.
>
> At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the concept of the mandala was applied to the traditional pilgrimage area located around the city of Mathura. The sacred geography was the Mathura mandala.

Mathura[14] is glorified as a sacred landscape also in *Bhaktirasâmrtasindhu* and *Mathura Mahâtmya* by Rûpa Goswamin[15] who draws on the *Padma Purâṇa* which extols "Mathura maṇdala as infused with "two aspects of Kṛṣṇa's inherent sakti" – *târaka* which bestows liberation and *pâraka* which bestows prema bhakti.

III

The subject of *Mathuramangala* is experiences of particular kinds, born at all times and places as Krishna moves about in the world of men and women. Through the experiences, the composition brings into perspective the 'being' phenomenon with different selves grappling with the question of what

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it is to be and how to be. Contingent on the nature of the subject, *Mathuramangala* makes us meet men and women who have lived with Krishna, in love and awe, in fear, and embodies the frenzy of emotions felt by them as they try to reconcile to a mode of being in the event of a heightened awareness of a split between themselves and Krishna. More than anything else, the text presents the split as a profound moment in the history of the evolution of human consciousness, and, in doing so approaches the apotheosis of lyrical art. What causes the split? It is the call from Mathura, the city of Kamsa. All along, while Gopa spent its days revelling in Krishna, Kamsa writhed. Having thrown his good and conscientious father into the prison, he finds himself in a den of anger, fear and despair, craving for Krishna, always wanting to kill him. One day, the anxious king orders his most trusted-minister Akrura with an imperious demand to fetch Nanda's sons to Mathura for the brothers to enjoy the great event, the Bow-festival. With the king's letter in hand, a terrified Nanda sets about to have the gifts ready while Yashoda wails and the gopis go into a state of shock. Kamsa's letter has just caused a breach in Gopa's Krishna experience. Every gopi would now tell a tale of separation in a language born in the throes of the rupture.

"The *kadamba* tree will wither / And die, Yamuna [...] / Will shrink into a trickle", "Birds, deer and trees will die." However, all tearful entreaties fail and Krishna starts for the city with a feeble promise to return after just "four days". Gopa gasps.

One's voice got choked;
Another was too shocked
To move her arms and legs;
A woman's breath was momentarily
Suspended; another went into a swoon
And fell to the ground while someone else
Beat her breast in exasperation.
One of them banged her head
Against a rock. Another moaned,
"O I am gone!" Someone prayed to Yama
To strike off her name from His records.
Someone else insisted on taking poison.
One's dress slackened;
Clothes fell off another woman's loins;
One's hair fell over her back.
Overpowered by emotion,
One's voice dropped.

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A howl of grief went up Gopa.

Here is a close resemblance to what Kamsa would experience as Krishna draws closer to Mathura. Both the gopis and Kamsa are overwhelmed by a fear of death. But while the gopis' fear of death betrays "the fear of loss of a love object" that of Kamsa betrays "the fear of obliteration as an individual" (Kakar, *The Inner World*, 34-35).

But Krishna would not stay back. He tells his friend Sudama,

"See that they weep no more.
Take them to their houses and tell them
To wait for me till I return."

The breach in Krishna experience would, however, turn out to be a blessing. While, in the first instance, it overwhelms the gopi with the anguish and despair of separation from Krishna, it eventually gives rise to a heightened Krishna consciousness. Krishna returns, as the voice of a reassuring destiny. His letter to the gopis which is brought by Uddhaba carries reminiscences of a Goloka[16], now lost, but at the same time is pregnant with the hope.of a Goloka regained.

Krishna, as an avatar of Vishnu, is the god of the householder, of the worldly, of ethical responsibility, and, of flexible moralities. Bound by his godly duty to lead humans to salvation, he belongs more to the sinner than to the saint. A human god, he was destined to bring salvation for Kamsa and blessedness upon Mathura[17]. Thus, he could not but leave Gopapura for Mathura.The drama in *Mathuramangala* begins with the predicament of the gopis as they try to come to terms with the possibility of surviving in a world deprived of Krishna, a threateningly profane world. The drama becomes more complex with the arrival of Uddhaba who tries to teach Yashoda and the gopis about how Krishna is the formless *Brahman*, the all-pervading numen.

Mother!
Why do you say 'my son' again and again?
The wise worship at His feet
For their salvation. He has no form:
No beginning, nor end.

Yashoda, who has "herself given birth to him," indignantly replies:

He whom you call formless
Is beyond human comprehension.
How could you make him
Your own when he belongs to none?
There is no way to catch the wind.
He expresses

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Himself in human beings
Like moon's reflection on water.

Leave it, O Govinda's messenger!
You may call him *Brahman*
As many times as you wish,
But he is son to me.
The wise worship him
For the salvation of their souls.
But, why discuss all that in Gopa ?
...
To prove my point, if you so like,
I shall now go to Mathura
And come back, carrying
Madana Mohana in my lap.

For Yashoda and the gopis, Krishna is of flesh and blood and cut capers with them. He has a concrete presence. He may be everywhere, as Uddhaba says, but he is of Gopa. Exhorting the gopis to "master the six *chakras*" to "look within" and "try to recognize Him", Uddhaba sends out his message: the need to progress from intense attachment to intense non-attachment, from being a derelict ascetic to a detached householder, from love of a particular God to faith in universal Order and thus attain salvation. The gopis, in turn, question Uddhaba's idea of *Brahman*.

Our only *Brahman* is he
Who swallowed the forest fire
And protected the people of Gopa
From Indra's wrath by raising Govardhan.
We worship him with love.
...
If *Brahman* is in every being,
Why look for him elsewhere?
If he is in you as *Parama* bird,
Who has sent you here, then?
O Hari's emissary! Who ordered you
To come to Gopa and whose message
You carry to us?"

When Uddhaba said Krishna had sent him
The gopis burst into laughter.
They said, "That shows

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Our *Brahman* is the Lord of all.
O Hari's emissary! Your *Brahman*
Does errands for Krishna."

The gopis' language is phenomenologically charged and has a rhetorical effect. Such arguments cannot be of the meek and the stupid. For the gopis burning in the fire of separation, Krishna, who had said that he would return soon, is a lover who has cheated them. Overwhelmed by pain, they would not allow Uddhaba to lead them away from the marks of Krishna's love into the lofty intemperate zone of *Brahmajnana*. Finally, Uddhaba stands transformed and seeks to be endowed with the life and spirit of the gopis. Salvation is no purpose, Krishna is.

The theological aesthetic in *Mathuramangala* finds renewed vigorous expression through the "aesthetics of memory" (Miller in Hawley and Marie eds. 14) in Sections XXIV and XXVII, very like Radha's reminiscence of Krishna in Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*. After Krishna fulfils his avowed purpose of his descent to the earth, he is seen relaxing in his palace in Mathura when he is stung by the memories of pleasure-filled moments with the gopis:

Suddenly, one day, the thought of the gopis
Possessed Govinda's mind. His longing
For their love, like a dark night,
Spread its wings all around.
He felt like burning in the flames of lust.

and second, when the gopis remember their days and nights with Krishna:

Once, here in Brindaban,
Breaking the silence of the night,
He played his flute so amorously
That it burnt us with the passion of love.
Forgetting the dignity of our family,
We left our houses
And ran to the forest.
His beauty captivated us.
He played a trick;
Without anyone's knowledge he vanished
Into the forest with Brindabati.

The night was dark
And we were scared.
We called him loudly;
Soon he appeared.
He held us in deep embrace.

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His divine dalliance charmed
All of us."

When Bhadra stopped
Lopamudra began, "O Uddhaba!
I remember him sitting under this tree,
Looking more handsome than Kama.
What he did to me that day
Is still etched in my mind.

Another day,
While playing in water, he did
Such mischief which cannot be told.
The memory of each day
Haunts us.

There occurs a reunion of the gopis with Krishna at the mental level. So enriched is their heart with memories of Krishna that they take on those qualities of Krishna that they have always loved. Brinda's[18] feet now appear like Krishna's lotus feet and attract a *bhramara* (bumble-bee). For several lines thence Brinda, deeply absorbed in Krishna, speaks to the bee with disgust about Krishna's love and betrayal (a popular segment in the *Bhagavata Purana* that has spurred numerous compositions in the *bhramaragita* tradition). Uddhaba counts this as the supreme evidence of the gopis' love for Krishna.

It is not only Uddhaba who stands transformed, the gopis are transformed as well. The transformation comes about with the call from Mathura. It is the call from Mathura that rescues a major human passion from the throes of the flesh transforming it into a passion of the human soul for the divine. For Krishna, armed with the vow to rid the earth of a vicious king, to revel with the gopis could not be a permanent arrangement. Nothing binds the human god as the desire for a just order and Krishna arrives in Mathura. Mathura is blessed, not only because its women found an opportunity to mingle with Krishna, or because the ugly *Kubuja* found her youth and beauty, or the deprived and the unfortunate found deliverance, but also because it was where the human god took his first firm steps in establishing righteousness in the world. It was where Krishna rehabilitated himself as a Yadava and as a Kshatriya (Radha refers to this as she taunts Krishna in "Bhramaragita" in the *Bhagavata Purana*). It was where Krishna found his purpose.

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To punish Kamsa who tormented the good,
the Lord left his primal form of light
up there and took birth here:
What are people who cannot sing of him,
the Lord placed first in the Vedas,
who cannot jump about
in the streets—
Why do the learned and the wise
chant and roll the beads"
Are they even human? - Nammalvar, *Tiruvaymoli* 3.5.5

The gopis are intelligent enough to understand the message implicit in Uddhaba's presence in Gopa: that of Krishna's no-return. Inherent in their surrender to Krishna's designs is their tacit knowledge of Krishna as the imperishable all-pervading Brahman. It is also true that the gopis know of no distance between themselves and Krishna, for, they have lived with him on equal terms. Hardy explains the tension between their lived experiences and their awareness of Krishna's infiniteness as such:

For the Vaishnava, then, the combination of humility and passion in devotion is an essential balance, exhibited by the Gopis. The intimate deity is emphasized over the cosmic or almighty deity and yet, for the devotee, they are always experienced in dialectic tension with one another. Neither is excluded; rather, the one is implicitly or explicitly experienced while the other is in the background. The intimate deity inspires passionate devotion, and the cosmic or powerful deity, a devotion of humility. The devotee "knows" the greatness of God, but due to being absorbed in devotional passion, appears to "forget" this dimension." (165)

Now, when Uddhaba arrives in Gopapura with the message of Krishna's no-return as a fait accompli, what could one expect the cowherd girls to do? To grovel and plead? The gopi who quivered and quaked on receiving the news of Krishna's impending departure to Mathura is now a formidable lover, one who cannot be led away in the name of familial duty and societal honour. Just as the god is bound by his desire for a just order, the gopi is bound by her desire for Krishna. From the point of view of Uddhaba the seeker of truth, the gopi is an ignorant lover who fails to see the larger picture, a woman who is wasting herself in love. Before anyone else, Gopa has been witness to the cosmic vision in Krishna's tender pranks. However, Uddhaba's vision of 'truth', profound and abstract, is quickly overwhelmed by the gopis' vision of love, which is "like the earth, rich with human passions." Uddhaba and the gopis are believers on a metaphysical quest. But while Uddhaba's quest is shastric and doctrinal and finds expression in abstract terms, that of the gopis is based on felt experiences

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and finds expression in a folk sensory idiom. When Uddhaba says that Krishna is formless, the all-pervading *Brahman*, what he is referring to is unknown. Uddhaba's *Brahman* perhaps denotes a different range of experiences of Krishna which is outside of what the gopis have experienced. Which of these set of experiences is real? Uddhaba's knowledge of Krishna as *Brahman* may be a denotation of what really is, but the lived experiences of the gopis are no less real. Uddhaba's *Brahman* is not as accessible to human experience as the Krishna of Gopa is[19].

The gopis, by their arguments, force Uddhaba to realise that his knowledge of Krishna might just be incomplete. In the world of everyday experience, Uddhaba cannot but bow down to the gopis, because, while the latter use words whose meaning derive from their most intimate experiences of Krishna, Uddhaba's knowledge of Krishna is of a transcendental nature which is "not within the range of what we [one] can possibly experience". Such is the force of their arguments that Uddhaba stands transformed and realises that desire for Krishna is the most legitimate of all life practices. Uddhaba's presence in Gopa throws into perspective a major human passion – the question is no more about the propriety of the gopis' love for Krishna but about how to love; the physical separation from Krishna gives birth to such emotions and feelings which sustain the gopi in Krishna's absence; now is born a Krishna consciousness which annihilates any sense of self.

By talking of Krishna as *Brahman*, Uddhaba introduces a conceptual metaphor, seeking to change what the gopis have experienced. This, the latter reject vehemently :

Your wise talks
Are of no use. A little curd
May turn a potful of milk sour,
When added to it.

All the arguments of the cowherd girls are born from the world of here and now. The argument between Uddhaba and the gopis is not a war to be won. It is the manifestation of the eternal human attempt to understand reality. In *Mathuramangala* Uddhaba is seen coming down from his elevated state of knowledge to share the reality of the gopi experience. In a way, Uddhaba's exhortations may be seen as directed more towards the self, than towards the gopis. The exchanges serve as dramatic device to contrive a well-formed acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the gopis' desire for Krishna.

In a sacred world, there is always an Uddhaba who vouches for a particular way of life which is to "control the six *chakras*", and, there are the gopis who fall back on more human ways to partake of the *Brahman*. With no soteriological preoccupation, the dwellers of Gopa dwell in Krishna.

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whole-heartedly. With Krishna around, there is no profanity in anything, anywhere. Every human activity is sacred: be it Krishna eating mud, be it him stealing butter or the gopis' robes or be it him making love. As agency, subject or witness, every dweller of Gopa is enriched with private moments of enlightenment and has no need for Uddhaba's knowledge of *Brahman*.

The theological aesthetic finds expression in *Mathuramangala* in more ways than one – in the wails of Yashoda who mourns her empty lap and in the warm tears of love shed by the gopis who go around showing the marks of Krishna's nails on their breasts, in Kamsa's obsessive fear and hatred of Krishna as well as in Uddhaba's surrender to the gopi bhava. All beings, according to their natures, partake of the enduring spirit Krishna.

IV

What is in it for us, those with a relatively 'secular' taste[20]? The overlay of religious interpretation on the narrative (Shackle and Snell eds. 155) often does not appeal to a modernist rational sensibility. However, with Krishna as the subject, one cannot pretend to read *Mathuramangala* as a song of mere passions of the flesh. First and foremost, its intended reader is an aesthete with a "predisposition toward the bhakti spirit of the text" (Gupta & Valpey eds. 13). Secondly, it has to be recognised as a work deeply set in Puranic cosmogony. The gopis know as well as Uddhaba does that Krishna is never absent. All is well, until the invitation from Mathura sends the gopis into a frenzy leading them to forget that Krishna is never absent[21]. Such forgetfulness serves as a theological aesthetic, inviting the reader to participate in the drama of the gopi experience of longing for Krishna. The gopis are filled with anger, anxiety, eagerness and desperation; their devotional life is not that of "peaceful love" as that arises in "tranquil people who comprehend Krishna as the highest Self" (Haberman in Bryant ed. 420) but of "sorrowful love" (Haberman in Bryant ed. 424) which causes them to sigh and swoon. But the gopis will not perish. They, who lived with Krishna, now dwell in him at all times of the day. How do they do so? Through remembering him and revisiting their days and hours with him. The poet Bhakta Charan Das vouches for a similar way of life, perpetuating the Vaishnava performative of chanting Hari's name, recollecting and remembering Hari's pastimes, and remaining under the tutelage of a guru and in the company of sadhus, all of which have been explicitly enumerated among others as the practices of Bhakti (see Haberman tr. *Bhaktirasâmrtasindhu*)

Those who worship him
With all their heart. their sins

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Shall surely be redeemed.
Leave aside all other gods.
Meditate only on Hari.
...
Wealth, relatives and parents are like
Lightning; none of them
Will ever accompany the dead.
O Noble Ones!
Therefore, worship at Govinda's feet,
...
It is said in Puranas that
He sends those to hell
Who do not chant Hari's name.
O Noble Ones! Keeping this in mind
Give up self-pride
And meditate on Radhagovinda.

Not only that, the composition also seeks to keep alive a pragmatic devotional creed[22] - that of service in separation, one of the central tenets of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. In our world of here and now, where gods do not move about in the world of humans, longing for Krishna is a permanent state, service in separation is what we have to remain contented with. What follows is transcendental bliss.

Here then is "art in the service of religion"[23] (Brown 8). A valid activity for scholars would be to study the artistic expression of religion. In the Odia cultural context, texts such as *Mathuramangala* had both instrumental and social value. They were, as Brown says, helpful in "making truths more memorable, teaching more pleasurable, preaching more audible, and religious practice more enjoyable (especially for someone just entering the stream or starting the spiritual path)" (6 Their social value inhered in their nature as identity texts such as to maintain the coherence of a religious as well as a literary community. For poets such as Bhakta Charan who yearns for the company of sadhus and is fighting the "waves of desires" to prevent himself from drowning in the sea of the world, such enterprise brings "a sense of social and cosmic support"[24]. It behoves us to remember however that many such artistic expressions, particularly the corpus of literature termed as Vaishnava sahitya, in an ambitious attempt to explain the experience of the transcendental, glorified the sensual and were reviled as obscene or irreligious[25].

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In the early period of British colonial rule in Odisha, *Mathuramangala* was one of the favourite compositions after *Keshaba Koili*, *Kamalalochana*, a few *chautishas* and *Gopibhasha* to be taught at the primary level of schooling. With its easy style, *Mathuramangala* is known to have captivated readers' minds, while serving as a textbook of literature as well as a sourcebook for the development of an orientation towards practical religion (Samantaray 59). With the start of modern English education, artificial lines were drawn between religious and secular beliefs and practices – "Oh, religious stuff," one would say and texts such as these gradually fell by the wayside. However, that *Mathuramangala* belongs to a magnificent corpus of "countless expressions of the multifaceted Krishna tradition" (Bryant ed. 16) is less significant than it is as a locally stylised act of 'poetic world-making' illustrating such ideas and practices which have forever moved human beings. It owes its claim to poetical honours in the Odia tradition, not to critics or scholars, but to the common man and woman, the householder and the wandering ascetic, the village priest and the farmhand, all of who perhaps never studied theology or philosophy but were "steeped in the poetry, texts, and traditions of Krishna devotion" (Sanford 3).

V

The Krishna experience in *Mathuramangala* is both an experience of a religious life dominated by the senses and kept afloat by a faith outside the interpretive realms of human reason, as well as the experience of a rational being, with full faith in the highest potential of man, engaged in consciousness-raising exercises. The first kind is as exemplified by Yashoda and the gopis, which was for the first time uniquely represented by the *Bhaktirasâmṛtasindhu*. The second is as exemplified by Uddhaba who, with his knowledge of the formless all-pervading Brahman, initiates himself into a profound way of life. The gopis are individuals who are highly practised in remaining perpetually in a heightened state of consciousness. They have had peak experiences of Krishna, the archetypal Self, the Self that had proclaimed itself in the *Bhagavad Gita* through their love unions which they recall in Krishna's absence. Kamsa in Mathura is a stark reminder of the egoist rational self that always threatens to make a dent in the peak experience[26]. The departure of Krishna for Mathura is a metaphorical instance that pushes the gopis into a state of intense pain and anguish because of their selfish desire for Krishna as well as because of their inability to override the duality between themselves and Krishna. However, Uddhaba's advaitic *jnana*, rejected though it is by the gopis, serves as a gentle push to the

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souls empowered by love and faith to continue to suffer in separation even as they recognise Krishna's true nature. In his letter to the gopis, it is Krishna whispering in their ears, as if to say love me or worship me, curse me or taunt me but remember who I am. The gopis realise the need for Krishna's separation and had to allow Mathura to partake of Krishna. In their split is an even deeper realisation of the need for oneness with the supreme Self, a realisation that would forever keep them from being ensnared with the painful dualities of the world. The states of being of the gopis, Akrura, Kamsa and Uddhaba–the whole of *Mathuramangal*a–may thus be read as an extended metaphor for the different stages of consciousness. Krishna is a metaphor for the supreme Consciousness. The gopis, forever dwelling in him, come closest to self-actualisation. Lost in thoughts about their intimacy with Krishna, the gopis flourish and feel the "embrace of freedom"[27] while Kamsa, deeply attached to Krishna in anger and fear experiences him as destructive and all-devouring. *Mathuramangal*a is thus a unique representation of metaphysical quest in folk idiom. Its language is rich with human passions and natural cadences such that one experiences horripilation but as is true, with all things human, is naturally limited in its semantic potential while trying to express the inexpressible.

Scholars have tried to read a social meme in the gopi-Uddhaba encounter : Uddhaba as a representation of the male Brahminical dominance in the field of shastric knowledge and the gopis of low class women who do not think of themselves as any less qualified for the Krishna experience (see Novetzke). But it was not only the gopis who experienced Krishna. The alvars, Chaitanya, Mira, all experienced Krishna. Surely, the exercise is still on. The world of Gopapura is not of social class related to birth status or to wealth, is not a gendered space. It is the value system of a sacred world, of humans in peak or near peak states of consciousness. The search for truth and self is too transcendental an exercise to be seen in terms of a power structure. Problems of gender and social class are irrelevant to the consciousness raising exercise, which, by its nature, is highly individualistic and independent. Who knows what wrecks the souls who have been living out their own devotion ?

> "Is it not enough to dwell
> On the Giver of holy texts, Govinda,
> Is it not enough?"
>
> \- Purandara Dasa and M. Raghunandan

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Acknowledgement :
**I consider myself fortunate for having been invited by Shri Basant Kumar Tripathy and Shri Debendra Kumar Dash to write this introduction. I owe my humblest thanks to them, not only for having put their faith in me but also for bringing such a venture my way. However evanescent, all those blissful moments of Krishna consciousness will see me through this life.*

NOTES

[1] See Achyutananda Das's *Shunya Samhita* Ch. 10 and Dinakrishna Das's *Namaratna Gita* for how the Odia imagination plays with the idea of Krishna as a human being.

[2] For literary, archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic evidence of references to Krishna as a divine being in the periods subsequent to the time of *Chandogya Upanishad*, see Edwin F. Bryant ed. Krishna: A Sourcebook, pp. 4-8.

[3] For *BG* as a "solution of a critical social problem" (see Hein (127) quoted in Elder, *The Snake and the Rope*, p. 248)

[4] Holdrege, "Mystical Cognition", p. 184.

[5]See Siegel, p. 389.

[6]Sankara and Ramanuja, *dvaita*, *advaita*, *saguna* and *nirguna brahman* were not the preoccupation of the saints only. They had entered social discursive practices through popular poetic compositions.

[7] Bowman 285.

[8] Krishna's loveliness and beauty is always the object of admiration in Vaishnava literature. While making a point about "The Divine Androgyny of Krishna", Schweig (441-2) draws our attention to how Krishna "boldly identifies" with "special attributes of the feminine":

Of feminine attributes
[and their presiding goddesses],
I am fame, beauty, speech,
Remembrance, intelligence.
Constancy, and forbearance. [*Bhagavad Gita* 10.34 (second half of verse)]

[9] Gokul, about 15 miles to the south-east of Mathura. Its modern name is Mahavan. However, today's Gokul is believed to be separate from the Gokul mentioned in the ancient scriptures.

[10] See *Manabodha Chautisha* and *Kalakalevara Chautisha*, two compositions by Bhakta Charan Das. While the first advocates renunciation of worldly life, the second sings the charms of Krishna.

[11] For differentiations among *râga*, *vâṆi* and *vritta* in Odia poetry of the period, see "Introduction" in B.C. Mazumdar, ed., *Typical Selections From Oriya Literature*, Vol. I, University of Calcutta, 1921, pp, xxi-ii.

[12] [The Play of Braj Devotion], original text in Sanskrit.

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[13] For details of the schema of *Braj mandala*, see Shah (56-57), sections "The Landscape as Braj Mandala, the Organized Sacred Space of Ritual" and "The Mapping of Braj and the Structure of the Groves".
[14] For the pilgrimage network in Mathura mandala, see Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment*.
[15] In this context, see the 16th cent. text *Vrindavan Mahamrta* by Prabodhananda Saraswati. Also see Vrndavana Mahatmya in *Brhadbrahman Samhita*.
[16] The eternal abode of Radha-Krishna according to Gaudiya Vaishnavas.
[17] Mathura occupies a central position in Vishnu's (Krishna) scheme for a righteous world. Destroying corrupt kings such as Kamsa is part of the god's social duty. "One significant component of dharma is social duty, and its preservation presupposes maintaining proper state leadership. [...] Whether it is the gods who have lost their posts in heaven, or human kings who terrorize their people, or natural disasters that threaten to destroy the world's leadership, the loss of royal order is a perpetual problem that Vishnu must solve. At different times he appears in the world to destroy corrupt kings, or to protect righteous kings, or to become himself a king and demonstrate ideal leadership" (Gupta and Valpey 4).
[18] Brindabati is named in Jagannath Das's [Odia] *Bhagavata Purana* as the favourite gopi. She is also mentioned in *Harivamsa* which was translated into Odia by Achyutananda Das. She is of same status as Radha among Krishna's favourite gopis, as said in *Brahmavaivarta Purana* (See Mukherjee 80-81).
[19] In this context, see Sardella and Ghosh (222-3 in Gupta and Valpey eds.) for the strands of thought in *advaita* (main proponent Shankara) and *dvaita* (main proponents Ramanuja and Madhavacharya) Vedanta schools.
[20] Reasons such as 'scientific temper' and 'modern rationalism' notwithstanding, I would rather explain 'secular taste' as an outcome of the increased demand for a life away from the matters of Spirit.
[21] See Schweig in Bryant for how "Maya acts as a veritable catalyst for intimacy, as she camouflages manifestations of God's almighty aspect by providing him with a form that his devotees can relate to personally and affectionately" (471). See the amusing conversation between Krishna and Yogamaya on p. 471.
[22] The devotional model of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, *vipralambha seva*
[23] See Brown (8).
[24] Hein "Radha and Erotic Community" (124) in Hawley and Wulff eds. *The Divine Consort*. Hein does a socio-cultural analysis of the rise and fall of the Radha cult in Vaishnava history.

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[25] See Barbara Miller's "Preface" (ix) to her translation of Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda, Love Song of the Dark Lord*, for condemnation of Jayadeva's eroticism in the modern period. The Odia *Gopibhasa* by Danai Dasa and *Kotibrahmandasundari* by Upendra Bhanja were also subjected to vehement criticism for their explicit sexual content. For criticisms of Vaishnava literature by the *bhadralok* in the colonial period, see Sardella and Ghosh (226-30 in Gupta and Valpey eds.).

[26] See Clifford, "The Enemy Transformed".

[27] "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation / I feel the embrace of freedom / in a thousand bonds of delight" (Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 73)

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MATHURAMANGALA

Canto I

[The poet invokes the Almighty in various names to aid him in his exalted endeavour, then, touches upon the central idea of the poem. He proclaims that it will be an epic of Krishna's heroic exploits – how he killed Kamsa, Keshi and others – which has its source in *Bhagavata*, Book X. In a plan to kill Rama and Krishna, Kamsa sends Akrura, his most trusted minister to Gopa to fetch them. Raga: *Chakrakeli*.]

Glory to Govinda,
The Darling of Gopapura.
Glory to Damodara,
Rama's younger brother.
Glory to Kamsa's Destroyer,
The Saviour of the Universe.
Glory to Madhava,
Armed with the *nandaka*.
Victory to Lakshmi's consort,
Slayer of demons.
Victory to Ananta,
Existing in all creations.
Victory to Baka's killer
And Naraka's Destroyer.
Glory to Protector of Devotees,
Enemy of Mura.
Glory to the One resting on
The waters of ocean *Karana*.
Glory to Mohana, Life of the World
And the greatest Enchanter.
Praise be to Nrusingha,
Hiranya's Destroyer.
Victory to Jadava,
Moon of Braja
And, Biswakarma,
The Creator of all.

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Essentially formless,
You take many forms.
For the benefit of cattle and brahmins,
You descend to the earth.
You have no beginning, no middle, nor end.
You are Soul of all souls
And Motivator of all actions.

To define your immensity
Is beyond the ability of Vedas
And scriptures.
In obedience to your command
Brahma created fourteen worlds.
Gods such as Indra, Moon and Sun
Are your exquisite handiwork.
There is not a thing you did not make.
You are Bhabagrahi,
The most considerate.

Therefore, I seek your blessings,
Thinking on your lotus-feet.
I do not need any wealth
Except devotion, without which,
My life will rot in poverty.

I have heard wise men say
That worldly worries can be vanquished
By chanting Krishna's name.
The *Puranas* record the lives of
Saints who attained salvation
Through meditation,
Learning, listening and recollection.
Those who chant Hari's name
Are liberated, their sins atoned.

Therefore, a thought haunts me:
Why do I let myself perish
In the wilderness of worldly life?
Wealth, relatives and life
Do not last for all time.

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This body of wood will be consumed
By the fire of sin.

Driven by greed and temptation
I revel in lust, women and boastfulness.
I nurse sinful thoughts in my mind.
My life peters out as time passes.
Considering all this, I now think
How to escape this world of unhappiness.

The story of Krishna
Is an ocean of nectar, a remedy
For the maladies of *Kaliyuga*.
So I wish to narrate it briefly.
It will surely redeem my sins.
I shall sing Hari's *lila* in Rhyme.
O my Lord! O Nanda's son!
Bless me.

It will be an epic
Of his heroic exploits, how he killed
Kamsa, Keshi and others.
Bhaktacharan begs: O Lord!
Reside in my heart and instruct me
How to accomplish my task.

Listen, O Noble Ones!
Suka narrated *Bhagavata*,
The story of Krishna's life,
To the delight of King Parikshita.
The Tenth Book records Kamsa's life
From birth to death.
Born to Drumila and Indumati,
Kamsa conquered the earth
By defeating all the kings.
Cruel to cattle and brahmins,
He forced gods
To surrender at his feet.
He stopped all religious practices
And followed the path of wickedness.

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Day by day his oppression increased,
Making everyone helpless and worried.
The aggrieved gods called a meeting
In which Indra spoke on how unfairly
The subjects were being treated.
To which sagacious Brahma replied,
"O gods! Let's go to Vishnu,
Now resting on the Milky Sea.
Let's appeal to him to descend
To the earth and kill the wicked demon.
That seems the only option to me."

Reaching the Milky Sea
They prayed to Vishnu, "O God of gods!
Save your earth from Kamsa's tyranny.
He is the plunderer of heaven
And the tormentor of cattle and brahmins."

Whom Vishnu thus consoled,
" You need not wait too long.
Soon I shall take birth
As Basudeva's son and kill Kamsa
For his sinful action." Pleased,
Gods to their abode returned.

After some days
Vishnu, leaving his snake-bed
Lay in Devaki's womb
For ten months. When he was born,
Basudeva carried him to Gopa
And left him there
For fear of Kamsa.
He grew up in Nanda's house
As luxuriantly as the moon
During the bright fortnight.

On the seventh day of his birth
He killed Putana
Whose body was as strong as thunder.
Next he slew Bakasura
Aghasura and Kubera's sons.

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He crushed Kaliya snake in Kalindi Lake
And devoured the forest fire.
Once Brahma made away with
His cows and friends, which he soon
Retrieved. Baruna abducted
King Nanda, whom he rescued.
To save Gopa from Indra's anger
He lifted Govardhan with his finger.
He spent his days at Brindaban merrily,
In the company of cowherd friends.
He stole the clothes of the gopis
And enchanted them in *Rasalila*.
He killed Keshi and other demons,
The assassins hired by Kamsa.

Finding his attempts
To eliminate Krishna failed,
Kamsasura shook in anger.
His eyes tearful,
He told Akrura, his minister,
"The words of Narada still ring
In my ears. Nanda's son is my
Only worry. I must, by any means,
Finish him off.
Those I sent to kill him,
Got killed themselves.
Putana went there,
Smearing poison on her breasts.
Next I sent Shakata and Truna.
Both, by him, were brutally slain.
To Baka, Agha, Byoma, Bachhasura
Keshi, Kadamba and Dhenuka.
The same fate befell.
After killing so many
Both the brothers
Are roaming free, unafraid.

Listen to me, O my minister!
You are my trusted follower.
I expect you will carry out my orders.
Move to Gopa tomorrow morning,
Fetch Rama, Krishna and Nanda

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Along with a year's tax arrears.
Bring them here so that
Nanda's sons I can slay.
Then only will I rest in peace
And remain safe as long as I live.

A disease, at the start, seems mild.
Allowed to grow,
It becomes malignant.
A small patch of cloud may burst
Into heavy rain.
A spark of fire in ashes
May turn into a flame
And set the world ablaze.
Such are Nanda's sons.
Spared now, they may bring
Death unto me anytime."

So saying, he held the minister
In deep embrace while his eyes
Flooded with tears.
Then he wrote a letter of command
With royal seal and signed it.
Handing it over to Akrura,
He asked him to leave for Gopa.

Once he had left
Kamsa felt relieved, but for a moment.
He could neither bathe, sleep, nor eat;
Food to him seemed as hateful as poison.
Wherever he looked
There was Nanda's Kanhai,
Bad dreams disturbed his sleep.
He started babbling.
In his dream, he saw his trunkless
Head moving southward,
His breath sounding like a conch.
Bedecked with a garland of *jaba* flowers,
He was riding a buffalo.
His flowing hair blew
In the gusty wind. All around he saw

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Jackals, dogs, owls, vultures, snakes
And cats, raising terrible cries.
Terrified to witness his own death,
He woke up, trying to comfort himself
With the Vedic saying that dreams
Never come true.
Then he fell asleep till the morning.

Akrura awoke and saw the sun
Rising in the eastern sky.
He proceeded towards his chariot,
Well-decorated by Bhakta Das.

Canto II

[Akrura leaves Mathura with Kamsa's letter to Nanda. He is greatly delighted thmat his overwhelming desire to see Rama and Krishna will be soon satisfied. On reaching Gopa, he hands over the letter to Nanda with the warning that King Kamsa's orders must be obeyed. Raga: *Kali.*]

Impatient to see Krishna,
Saphala's son hurried to the chariot.
He yoked the horses
And planned the route.
He mounted the chariot,
Pulled on the reins and drove off
As quickly as he could.

In the twinkling of an eye
His chariot flashed past
The limits of Mathura.
How lovely it looked
While moving on the road!
Soon it would return
With the King of gods to Madhupura.

"How lucky I am !"
Mused Kamsa's messenger,
"Thanks to my parents for whose
Virtues I shall have the honour
To see the King of gods.

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A look at his body,
As dark as cloud, will purge
My eyes of worldly dirt.
He will be sitting in Nanda's lap,
Surrounded by the boys of Gopa.
When he speaks to me
Or holds me in deep embrace
What a heavenly joy shall I taste!
Rama and Krishna will treat me
With honour and ask things confidential.
I owe a debt of gratitude
To Kamsa to have sent me here,
To have a vision of Krishna,
The Redeemer of my soul."

Preoccupied with such thoughts
He drove on until he espied
A mound of sand on which
The signs of a flag, a goad, a wheel
And two lotus-feet appeared.

With great joy
He jumped down from his chariot
In a frenzy of excitement.
Strewing some sand on his head
And crying out "O Krishna!"
He turned over and over
On the mound, completely speechless
While tears rolled down his face.

In ecstasy
He tried to embrace the sky,
His body shaking with passions of love.
Shutting his eyes,
He remembered Govinda's *lilas*,
Then, roaring deliriously,
He fell unconscious.
Rising after sometime and thinking on
Krishna, the enchanter of gopis,
He mused, "Ignorant and despicable
As I am, shall I have the fortune

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To bow down at his feet and he,
In return, will embrace me
With a cheerful smile?"

Collecting himself
He got into his chariot
And drove until he reached Gopa.
There, he saw Krishna, milking a cow.
His yellow dress on his dark body
Looked like lightning at rest
Against a sable cloud.
He wore a bun on his head
As beautiful as a rainbow,
Bedecked with sweet-smelling flowers,
Kissed by a swarm of bees.

Curls of hair on his forehead
Looked charming. His eyebrows were
Like Kama's bow, his eyes its arrows
And lines of collyrium
Touching his ears, its string.

His nose was like a *sesame* flower,
Lips like *parijata* and ear-rings like
The circle of light around the sun
And lovelier than lotus flowers.

His teeth were like the seeds
Of pomegranate. The smile
On his face would bewitch
Newly- weds. His garland shone
Brighter than gem. While milking,
A tinkling sound from his armlets came.
A little farther he saw Rohini's son
In a seven-hooded crown,
The curls of hair on his forehead
Like bumble-bees in a swarm.
Milk-complexioned he was
With sleepy eyes. His ear-rings
Against his white body
Looked like the sun placed near the moon

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And his lips had a mixed colour
Of lotus and *jaba.*

He wore a golden nose-ring,
A gem-studded armlet on his left arm
And a blue cloth around his waist.
Both the brothers were busy milking,
Filling containers
And calling to each other.
In dress, look and gait
They seemed alike. Bewildered,
Akrura failed to know
Who. between the two, was Krishna.

Sensing Akrura's dilemma,
Krishna thought,
"Though Kamsa's emissary,
How dearly I love him!
Besides being my devotee,
He is also my uncle. It will not be fair
To trouble him any longer."

When he cleared the mist of confusion
Akrura recognised him.
He fell at his feet, while his body shook
And tears of joy flowed from his eyes.

Taking him into his arms
Krishna dusted his body. Balarama, too,
Held him in a warm embrace.
Akrura felt he was dissolving
In Krishna's love, as salt in water.
They led him to Nanda's palace
Where they washed his feet
And offered him delicious dishes,
Followed by betel and camphor
Before smearing his body
With sandalwood paste.

Akrura was surprised

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To find things happening the way
He had thought earlier. He knew
Yashoda's son was omniscient.
Then, he was taken to a gem-studded
Bed with an elegant cover on it
And pillows strewn with flowers
And camphor powder.

As he lay on the bed,
Both the brothers started pressing
His feet. With tears in his eyes,
Krishna asked, "O uncle! How is Mathura
And how are our parents? Kamsa, the demon,
Killed all my brothers.
My father had to leave me here
To save me from his cruel hands.
He is cruel and inhuman ; he is a disgrace
To the clan of Jadavas.
As long as Drumila's son continues
To be as imperious as he is now,
Neither his subjects nor their wealth
Will be secure. O uncle!
Tell us, what brings you here?"

Akrura replied, "You know it well,
Still you feign innocence.
Well! In a plan to capture and kill you,
King Kamsa has sent me here.
I carry his letter to Nanda
Which expresses his great anger."

"Well, then," Krishna said,
A faint smile on his face,
"Give it to our father. Let's see
What the King of Braja says.
If he says yes, it is fine.
If no, how can we go?"

Hearing this, Akrura was worried.
He thought, "If my mission fails

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The King of Bhoja will be displeased.
But how can I take him against his will?
He is the only one who contains
A cluster of universe at his hair-root,
Whose feet are the underworld,
Head is the sky and whom,
Even Brahma cannot comprehend.
He can assume any form
At his own sweet will."

Guessing what was going on
In Akrura's mind, Krishna said,
"Listen, O minister!
I shall certainly go and kill Kamsa,
O Saphala's son! Meet Nanda
And deliver him the letter first."

Akrura sent for Nanda who woke up
From sleep and rushed to greet him.
Seeing Nanda, Akrura said sternly,
"O King of Gopa!
Here is Kamsa's letter for you.
Do as he says
Or face the consequence."

Scared, Nanda touched the letter
To his head.
Bhagatacharan says;
Akrura was angry to excess.

Canto III

[This section is dominated by the full text of Kamsa's letter in which Kamsa asks Nanda to attend the Bow-festival to be held a day after. He summons Nanda to Mathura with his sons, some of his men, gifts such as curd, milk and sweetmeat and also last year's tax arrears pending against him. Raga: *Bangalashree*.]

Fuming with anger,
Kamsa writes:

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"O Nanda, King of Gopa!
I command you to meet me forthwith,
Failing which, I will sever
Your head, for sure.

You know how great is my strength.
I am a comet to my foes.
Even war-mongering princes
Have to leave the battle midway.
And accept death.

When I am enraged
The earth quakes and the pole rocks.
Yama, Lord of Beasts,
Dare not challenge my authority,
Let alone others.

I can crush Chitrakuta
With a single blow. Like a goad,
I tear my enemies apart.
I am a shield of thunder
For those I shelter.

I am as benevolent as Indra
And as deep as the sea.
I am wiser than Brihaspati
And, in Vedantic discourses,
I can beat Bidhi.

None can equal me in piety.
I care for my subjects
As a father does to his sons.
The wind fears me and does not blow
In my kingdom in gusts.

Before my radiance
The flames of the God of Fire
Appear a dim glow.
To protect the virtuous
And to destroy the wicked
Is the principle I follow.

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Terrified by the size of my fort
The most powerful kshatriyas
Keep their distance.
Gods flee their abode in panic
When on heaven I mount an attack.

The Jadavas are lilies,
I am the moon. In beauty,
I am greater than the love-god,
And, in terms of forbearance,
More admirable than the earth.

I won victory over warriors
Without having to fight them.
The whole earth came under my sway.
You live so near, but never visit me.
How insolent you must be!

If I raise a loud cry
Animals in the three worlds
Will die in fright.
That they are still alive is because
They asked my favour and I obliged.

In my clutches,
I have gods such as Indra, Moon,
Sun and Brahma, the eight- handed.
Frightened by my war-cry,
The most wicked have fled.

You, stupid cowherd!
How dare you hold back my due!
Provoke me
And none, not even your father,
Can save you.
I shall reduce your kingdom
To a heap of ash.

With Jarasandha, the Great
As my father-in-law

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And Birakeshi, as my friend
I can destroy the whole world
In the twinkling of an eye.

I have with me warriors such as
Sura, Naraka, Byoma, Agha,
Pralamba, Kadamba, Drubinda,
Chanura, Mustika and Shalya.

You are a *sirisa* flower
Asking for a heavy rainfall,
Which is me. You will perish
By a mere touch of dew.

I am holding the Bow-festival tomorrow.
You are summoned to reach here
With presents. Have no fear;
I pardon you for all your mistakes.

Bring one hundred loads of curd
And plenty of sweetmeat.
Bring, at least, fifty men with you,
Whose services can be fruitfully utilized.
Send Rama and Krishna,
The two brothers, with Akrura.
I have not seen them for years.
Let me see how big
Your sons have become.

They will have an opportunity
To watch the great event;
You must be proud of it.
They will meet many great persons
Which will enhance their personality.

You have become old and weak.
How long will you live ?
Human body is made of clay ;
It is impermanent.
So, hand over your sons to us
While you are still alive.

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Crown them kings
And enjoy your leisure at home.
Your sons will attend to
The affairs of my kingdom.

Tomorrow morning
The Bow-worship begins.
Therefore, do not delay.
Reach here with all your gifts."

After going through the letter
Nanda was upset that Rama and Krishna
Would have to leave for Mathura
With Kamsa's messenger.

He called one of his men, instructing
Him to announce in Gopa,
Their journey
To Mathura next morning.

The King of Braja
Offered Akrura a royal welcome.
Bairagi Bhagatacharan says:
A wave of excitement
Swept over Gopa.

Canto IV

[Kamsa's order is relayed to the people of Gopa in form of public announcement. It comes as a shock to the gopis who express their sorrow in their own ways. Krishna consoles them by saying that they need not worry as he will return after four days. Raga: *Bilasa Manjari*.]

In the street
An announcement was heard:
"Akrura has arrived
To take Rama and Krishna away.
They will be accompanied by the king
Who commands you to be ready
For the journey tomorrow morning.

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Kamsa, the Mightiest, has arranged
A ceremony of Bow- worship.
Kings from far and near have arrived.
He has sent his messenger
To invite the King and others
To the festival."

It came as a terrible blow
To the people of Gopa.
The gopis, in a state of shock,
Looked like trees and hills struck
By lightning, one asking
The other what to do.

Seated in groups of five or seven,
They deliberated on how to live
Without Krishna.
They thought they would surely
Drop dead the moment
Narayana left Gopa.

One of them said,
"If need be, we are ready to
Lay down our lives,
But Krishna must be here.
Let people say we sacrificed
Our lives for Krishna's sake."
A doe-eyed gopi tearfully expressed,
"We will go blind from tomorrow
As we have to give our eyes
To Akrura."

Someone added,
"The lilies will perish
When the moon, their lover
Travels to the south-west,
Leaving them in the dark.
Will the moon really abandon *chandramani*?"

A woman, her eyes tearful, who

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Walked like the king of elephants,
Addressed to the ground,
"You will have the same fate
As ours. Both of us will lose
Our attraction with our ornaments gone."

One of the gopis suggested,
"Let's jump into Yamuna.
May Kamsa, for the sin of killing
Innocent women, lose his fame and happiness.
May he die in disgrace."

There was another who offered an option,
"Let's contribute some of our age
To Kamsa to make him live longer.
We are ready to give up our lives
If it ensures Krishna's stay here.
May God fulfill our wishes!"

A woman, love-lorn and nostalgic,
Let out a wail. Another, unable to bear
The sorrow held her friend close,
Throwing her arms around her neck.
One was rolling in the dust
While someone else
Was beating her breast.
One of the gopis, palpitating, stood still.
Uttering Govinda's name
Another went into a swoon.
Some accused Nanda of being silent
On the matter and Yashoda,
Of doing nothing to stop it.

To which Sarani, a gopi reacted,
"I have the answer. The women of Mathura
Know how to seduce men
By fraud and guile.
They must have sent some medicine
To silence the king and the queen.
This is the truth."

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Hearing this,
Hemabala burst into tears.
Between sobs, she said,
"If that be true
All my hopes are ruined. Once gone,
Yashoda's son will never return.
The wheel of fate has turned
Against us. Imagine, how cursed
His old parents are!"

Reaching Nanda's house
They found Krishna in conversation
With Akrura and Nanda
While others were busy packing
The gifts to be carried tomorrow.

Turning to Krishna
The women of Braja implored,
"Tell us, why is Akrura here?
Why such an announcement?
Why is the courtyard
Full of pots of milk?"

Krishna replied,
"O Beauties of Braja!
Kamsa has sent Akrura to take us.
God only knows
What will happen to us.

We are leaving for Mathura
Accompanied by my parents.
There, we will meet Kamsa
And watch the Bow-festival.
We will come back
Two or four days later."
His words made the gopis sadder.
Their minds, like fish,
Plunged into the sea of thought.
Bhagatacharan says:
The gopis went on weeping
Remembering Krishna's love.

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Canto V

[The wailing and weeping of the gopis continue, each recounting her love for Krishna. As the cloud of separation thickens the gopis break down with intense grief. Raga: *Madhupa Chautisha.*]

Staring at Govinda's lotus-face
The gopis said, " O Mohana!
Now that you are leaving for Mathura,
Who, in you absence, will look after us?

Your departure will mean our death.
Do we need to live longer
When our only support,
Mohana, is leaving for Kamsapura?

Better kill us by poison
And live in peace there.
Your absence but for a moment
Bears heavily on us, let alone
Two or four days.

When you went to Brindaban
Leading the cattle along,
In the company of your cowherd friends,
We used to wait anxiously
For your return.

Seeing you coming back,
We regained our lives,
As lilies bloom cheerfully
When the moon shines.

We would be filled with joy,
As is a lotus at the sight of the sun,
Or a blind man getting back his eyesight,
Or a poor man on finding a gem.

One look at your body,
As dark as a new cloud,
Makes us forget our sorrow.
How lovely your eyes are,

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Glistening like lotus flowers!

Eagerly we listen to your flute;
It inflames in us the passion of love.
We will miss it now, O Mohana!
What will the women of Brindaban do?

Who will protect us
From Indra's wrath?
Who will raise Govardhan? Who will slay
Sandha, Shakata,Truna and Baka?
Who will devour the forest fire?

Who will Nanda's queen tie
With ropes? Who will save Nanda
From the waters? Who will dance
On Kaliya's hood? Who will bring
Salvation to Manichuda?

Who will obstruct our way
And ask for fee?
Who will dance to our song?
Who will the queen punish with a stick,
O Mohana, for stealing butter?

Who will steal our clothes
And tie them to the *kadamba* tree?
Who, through fun and frolic, will fill
Our hearts with glee?

Who will play the flute at night
And pull the dark-haired gopis
To the forest? With whom will we
Play in gay abandon throughout the night?

Who will we smear with sandalwood paste?
Who will we adorn with garlands
Of wild flowers?
Whose bun will we deck with
Screwpine buds?
Whom will we hold in deep embrace?

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Before whom will we stand blushing,
O Mohana, with our heads downcast?

In whose praise will we compose songs?
With whom to play dice?
Who will we watch with smiles,
O Mohana, opening our doors a little wide?

Who will wink at us amorously
And lead us along to the arbour?
O Mohana, who will kiss our crescent-shaped
Cheeks again and again?

Who will rescue Radha
From the ghost's grip?
Who will remove our sorrows?
Who will roam with Brindabati?
Whom will we look for in Brindaban?

Without you,
The *kadamba* tree will wither
And die, Yamuna, Yama's sister,
Will shrink into a trickle, O Mohana!
Birds, deer and trees will die
Pitiably, remembering you.
Gopa will become as desolate as
A woman without a husband, O Mohana!

We are left to burn
By the fire of separation.
Our sorrows will increase day by day.
O Mohana, Kamsa's messenger
Has stood in our way.

With whom will we celebrate Holi?
To whom will we listen eagerly?
For whom will we make the bed
And wait for his arrival, O Mohana!

To whom will we offer betel?
On whose eyes will we put collyrium?
Whose curly, dishevelled hair

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Will we brush and braid, O Mohana!

Who will be at play
With boys of his age?
For whom will we hurry to Yamuna
To fetch water, O Mohana!

Why are you silent?
Is Akrura taking you against your will?
If so, we will take his life
And destroy his chariot.
Let the three worlds see it, O Mohana!"

To them Krishna offered consolation,
"Do not be sad, O Women of Gopa!
Be pleased to know we will soon return.
God will surely take care of us."

Nanda's queen was in tears
With her son in her lap.
Bhakta Das, holding Krishna's feet,
Cries "O Mohana!"

Canto VI

[On the eve of Krishna's departure Yashoda cries her eyes out, remembering his playful activities at home. The fond memories of her son and her apprehension for his safety in Mathura are expressed in a lively and vivid manner. Raga: *Baradi, Bahuda Basanta.*]

"O my dear Shyamaghana!
For whom shall I remain alive
If you go to Madhubhubana?
There will be utter desolation
In all the ten directions.
It will make life difficult for me,
Pining for you day and night.
O Light of my Life!
I shall be like a fish without water
Or a country having no ruler.

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Who shall I anoint with sandalwood,
Camphor, musk and saffron?
On whose eyes shall I put collyrium?
For whom shall I make the bed?
Who will ask his father for the moon?
O Light of my Life!
These memories will haunt me
After you are gone.

Whose hair shall I brush and braid
And festoon with wild flowers?
On whose forehead shall I put
A holy mark? Whose ears
Shall I adorn with rings? Who will
Occupy my thought day and night?
O Light of my Life!
Whose body shall I dust?
Who shall I dress up?

When you go to the forest
You carry my life with you.
Even a moments' separation
Bears heavily on me.
Now that you are leaving for Mathura
Who will you assign to look after me?
If I do not see your moonlike face,
O Light of my Life,
I shall jump into the gorge
And kill myself.

When I feed you with cream,
Butter, sweets and banana
You spit them out.
All attempts of Balia brother
To persuade you to eat
Are in vain. You flare up
And break the cooking pots,
O Light of my Life!
Now those will be things of the past.
How could God be so cruel to us?
Frightened by shadows

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You seize me, covering your face
With the end of my saree. You shake
In fear of dark spaces.
You are unable to climb high steps.
O Light of my Life!
Won't you be scared
When the elephants and
Horses of Madhupura
Raise loud cries,
O Shyama !

Terrified by the paintings
Of monsters on the wall,
You run away in fear.
Whom will you run for shelter now
When you come across demons in Kamsapura?
O Light of my Life!
Whom will you call mother there?
Who will come forward as your protector?

Tired, you fall asleep in my lap.
Disturbed by some unpleasant dream
You scream 'Mother!'
Holding me by my neck.
O Light of my Life!
These memories will be too painful
For me to bear.
To whom shall I say, 'Wake up, my dear!'?

Who, faint with hunger, will ask me
For food every morning?
Who shall I feed with cream?
Who will snatch the churner
From my hands, and, with it,
Break the curd pot?
Whom shall I tie to the *arjuna* tree?
O Light of my Life!
For whom shall I compose songs?
Whom will people call
The Son of Gopa?

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Against whom will the gopis complain
To me? From whose hands shall I
Snatch lumps of earth?
Who will open his mouth wide
For sweets? O Light of my Life!
For whom shall I sing
'Swing, Elephant, Swing!'

Who, with Balarama, will drive
The cows to the forest to graze?
Who will play the flute
In various tunes ? Who will gather
The cowherd boys
And dance among them?
Whom will the people of Braja
Watch now ? O Light of my Life!
Our kingdom will lose its lustre.
Will those days ever come back?

Who will save Nanda
From Baruna's hands?
Who shall I look for in the streets
Or under the *kadamba* tree?
Who will complain to Nanda
'Mother beat me today'?
O Light of my Life!
Your father, in anger, will punish
Me to make you happy."

Tears streamed from the queen's eyes.
She kissed her son and, then,
Looking at Balarama, said,
"Be always with your brother.
He may be scared at the sight of
Kamsapura.

You are strong,
But my son is weak and innocent.
He is likely to lose his way
In the new place. Listen, O Balarama!
Never leave him for a moment.
Don't enter crowed places

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Showing your boldness.

Mathura is not the same as Gopa
Where you do mischief
And get away with it.
Do not do anything that will enrage
The cruel King, Kamsa.
Your safety is my chief concern.
I shall be waiting eagerly for your return.
If you delay,
I shall go there myself and bring you back."

Hearing this,
Rohini burst into tears,
"O my Rama!" she cried. Taking her son
Onto her lap, she wailed,
"See, how sullen my son's moonlike
Face looks! Kamsa has played
A trick on us.
He is the root of all evil."

Akrura shouted at Nanda,
"Hurry up. The night is about
To pass. Any delay
Will invite the King's wrath."

Now it was time to leave.
The street became noisy and crowded.
The gopis gathered before the chariot
In which Rama and Krishna were seated,
They looked more beautiful
Than crores of Kama.
The grand procession started,
Two fierce lions followed by
Wild elephants and lionesses.

People heaved a sigh of relief,
Thinking that Krishna will bring an end
To Kamsa's regime.
As Gopinath mounted the chariot
Bhakta Das became an orphan.

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Canto VII

[As the moment of parting draws nearer, the gopis become restless and extremely upset. They feel themselves being let down by Krishna who is leaving them unprotected. They pray to him again and again not to be so unkind. Raga: *Ahari. Dutai Baramasi Banee.*]

Perturbed to see Krishna departing,
The fish-eyed gopis, oblivious of the presence
Of respectable elders, cried out,
"O Krishna! What provokes you
To kill us so mercilessly?
We are not Putanas of Gopa.

Nanda's son is now following
The path of Dasaratha's son.
He had forsaken one woman
While you are deserting many.
O Krishna! He killed one Bali only.
Can't you see how many balis
You are putting to death?

You are Krishnachandra;
He is Ramachandra. Your names
Show a bond between you.
He went into exile,
Leaving his parents behind.
You too do the same.
He had his brother with him;
You also have your brother
In your company.

Sumanta, the charioteer, took him
To the deep forest. Now Akrura
Is taking you to Madhubana.
O Krishna! He was accompanied by
A woman; you have none.
That is the only difference."

One of the gopis, who did not approve,
Said, "No, Govinda is not so.

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A bumble-bee, excited by the beauty
Of a flower, sucks all its honey.
Then, cutting its stalk,
It flies to another flower.
Likewise, Moon of Brindaban
Is walking out on us. In colour
And attitude Krishna and the bee
Are close to each other."

To which her friend added,
"The doings of Krishna remind me
Of the story of the crow
And the cuckoo."

Someone quipped,
"Our sea of compassion has turned
To a sea of salt. Of what use
Are the treasures in it
When its water is briny?
One who mistakes it for fresh water
And drinks it, dies."

Another gopi commented,
"Krishna cannot be the moon's equal
As the latter has one thing
That Krishna does not have.
Now he is going to acquire it. O dear!
To whom will we voice our grief?
The one who should have listened to us
Is going away to take on Kamsa".

Overwhelmed by grief,
They blocked Akrura's way.
They begged him,
"Go back with your chariot.
Govinda is not going anywhere.
If you don't, you will be affronted.
Remember, none of the cowherds
Will come to your rescue."

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Requesting Krishna and Akrura
Not to advance, they cried bitterly,
"O Krishna, why don't you listen?
It seems you have closed your ears
As they close a pit.

Have you forgotten how many times
You saved us from peril?
On the eve of your departure
You are taking those lives you had saved.
O Krishna! It is not fair.
You are not the same Govinda,
As benevolent as before.

We got you by the grace of Lord Shiva.
Now, forsaken by God,
We are as helpless as bees.
O Krishna! The bees save honey
Which the hunter takes away
By killing them in fire.

We are the bees,
Krishna is the honey
And Akrura is the hunter.
The women of Mathura are fortunate
To have Krishna as their companion.
O Krishna! We, the gopis, are vanquished.
Their lily-like faces will bloom
When they see our Moon of Gopa.

As *sirisa* flowers wilt
When heavy rain lashes at them,
So are we. O Krishna!
We will fade like *night jasmine*
When the rays of the sun touch it.

Like the eggs of a tortoise
Left alone on the shore,
We are left in the dark

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With none to protect us. O Krishna!
You will see with your own eyes
How, by taking poison,
We will kill ourselves.

Let the fourteen worlds know
We lost our lives as Krishna
Deserted us. He did not kill us
Himself, but his departure from Gopa
Caused our death.
O Krishna! You will be guilty of
Killing the ones you had sheltered."

One of the gopis shouted at Akrura,
"How wicked and unfeeling you are!
Why do you punish us thus?
O Akrura, the cruel one!
Rama and Govinda are our eyes;
You are plucking them out
As a bird does with its beak.

Like an axe,
You cut the creeper of love
At its root. You have turned to a betrayer
After you became Kamsa's minister.
O Akrura! To please your king
You turn a blind eye
To the feelings of others.

The wicked do not give up their nature.
At the slightest opportunity,
They influence others like a spell.
O Akrura! You are one of them.
You cling to your wicked behaviour
As the body does to its shadow.

The conch, though born in the sea,
Is blown by the low-born.

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Your birth is noble
But your manners are mean.
O Akrura! You do not discriminate
Between good and evil.
You leave behind
A bad precedent."

Thus the gopis hurled
A tirade of abuse at Akrura.
Sunk in the river of sorrow,
They forgot their modesty.
They only wept and wept.
Bhagatacharan Das says:
They were struck by intense grief.

Canto VIII

[Krishna consoles the gopis by assuring them that he will return soon and that they are inseparable from each other. The gopis express their fear that the women of Mathura, adept in witchcraft, will seduce him and will not allow him to return to Gopa. Krishna dismisses their fear as unfounded and advises them to bear with his temporary absence. Raga: *Kalahansa Kedara.*]

Krishna said,
"Listen, O Beauties of Braja !
Can the moon remain away from the lilies?
Do you think, once gone,
I shall never come back?
Can the bumble-bee
Stay away from the lotus?

Can a fish live without water?
Can a *chataka* survive
Without watching for rain?
Wherever I may be
We are near to each other.
I am leaving you only for four days,
I give you my word".

To which the gopis replied,

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"There can be no greater sinners
Than us in the world.
O Life of Gopa! We feel more dead
Than alive at your departure.

You say the bumble-bee never forgets
The lotus, but it is only until
It finds a suitable alternative.
Please do not follow
The bumble-bee's example.

Your remark on the *chataka*
And the rain reveals your evil intention
To finish us off.
The *chataka*, though thirsty,
Would never touch any other water
Out of its love for rain.
Our relationship is no different.
What will happen to the *chataka*
If there is no rain?"

A smile on his face, Krishna said,
"O Dear ! We are getting late.
So, tell me quickly
What you wish to say."

The gopis cautioned him,
"O Enemy of Mura !
Beware of the women of Mathura;
They are witches.
Our only fear is that
They will seduce you and never
Allow you to come to Gopa".

Krishna replied, "Listen to me.
Can rock-salt smell like camphor?
Can a wild flower be compared with a lotus?
Can *tasar* be equal to silk?
Can sapphire be as good as diamond?
Can brass and gold be the same?

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Can darkness and moonlight co-exist?
The women of Mathura
Are nothing in comparison with you.
Do not worry. We will not stay long.
So bid us farewell cheerfully."

The grief-stricken women lamented,
"O how cursed we are!
We cannot live a day without you;
Four days are too long to bear.
If you do not keep your word
We will surely give up our lives.
The blame for killing innocent women
Shall be on your shoulders."
With words of consolation, Krishna said,
"O doe-eyed gopis !
O gold-complexioned Beauties!
Have no fear.
As soon as the Bow-festival is over,
We will offer our gifts to Kamsa
And come back."

"O Shyamasundara!" cried the women,
"You are the life of the gopis.
Our lives will follow you
Wherever you go, leaving behind our bodies
In Gopa. We will get back our lives
Only when you return."

Rama's younger brother told them,
"Listen. Think of those women
Whose husbands are away from home.
They would wait for their men for years
And when they return
Their joy redoubles".

To which the gopis protested,
"But if their men do not come back,
What will they do?

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Think of us. If you do not return
We will surely perish".

With soothing words, Krishna answered,
"Vishnu is witness to it.
I swear in the name of *Dharma.*"
Bhagata Das says:
It is hard to believe his words.

Canto IX

[Having all their attempts to put the journey on hold failed, the gopis feel extremely miserable. The immediate impact of their separation from Krishna on their body and mind has been narrated here in vivid detail. Raga: *Asadha Sukla.*]

Separated from Govinda,
The doe-eyed women of Braja
Burst into tears ;
Their buns loosened
And tumbled down;
The lustre of their lips faded;
They sweated all over,
Their golden cheeks lost their glow.

One's voice got choked;
Another was too shocked
To move her hands and legs;
A woman's breath was momentarily
Suspended; another went into a swoon
And fell to the ground while someone else
Beat her breast in exasperation.
One of them banged her head
Against a rock. Another moaned,
"O I am gone!" Someone prayed to Yama
To strike off her name from His records.
Someone else insisted on
Taking poison.

"Let's jump together into the gorge

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Of Yamuna", one said.
"Let's jump into fire", said another.
Someone suggested," Let's cut our throats."
"Let's pluck out our eyes,"
Said someone else.

Greatly annoyed, one demanded,
"Let's attack Akrura. Let Kamsa do
Whatever he likes. He may, at the worst,
Force us out of his kingdom.
We do not need wealth. We may stay
Anywhere, but let Krishna be here.
Now, ask Akrura to go back."

One's dress slackened;
Clothes fell off another woman's loins ;
One's hair fell over her back.
Overpowered by emotion,
One's voice dropped.
A howl of grief went up Gopa.

One of them cried out,
"O Hari! The greatest Enchanter!
You are killing the women
Of your own caste."
Another sighed,
"O the moon-faced One!"
Someone wailed,
"O the killer of Sandha and Shakata!"
Another called out,
"O Enemy of Baka!"
Someone addressed him
As the destroyer of Kaliya's vanity.

One of the gopis alleged,
"O Putana's killer!
Your heart is as unfeeling as stone.
How do you justify your name Krupasindhu
When you have sympathy for none?
Now we are certain your heart

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Is as dry as a river in summer.

Why do you call yourself
'Friend of the Poor' when you deprive
The poor of your mercy?
We will insult anyone who calls
You by that name again.
Better call yourself
'A betrayer in the garb of a friend".
Realising the gopis' sorrowful plight,
Krishna turned to Sudama and told him,
"See that they weep no more.
Take them to their houses and tell them
To wait for me till I return."

Akrura drove the chariot along,
Leaving them in utter despair.
They felt like fish out of water,
each staring blankly at the other.

As a forest looks
When the spring is gone
Or a river after the rains
Or the moon during the dark fortnight
Or lotuses when dew falls on them
Or lilies in the absence of the moon
Or a woman without a husband
Or a world bereft of *Dharma*
Or a brahmin without the knowledge
Of Vedas or a man without wealth
Or a woman without a son
Or a king without a kingdom
Or a pundit forgetting his studies
Or a child with no mother
Or a handsome man without eye-sight
Or a woman without ornaments
Or a mountain without trees,
So did the gopis look
When Krishna departed.

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All were lost in the sea of thought,
Darkness spread all around.
As a *chakora* behaved madly
On the new moon day,
So did the gopis ; their minds
Revolved like a potter's wheel.

To them, all the worldly things
Seemed spiteful. Their happiness gone,
They looked as gloomy
As *sirisa* flowers in winter
Or like *champak* flowers
Untouched by bumble-bees.

The heavy clothes they wore
Seemed to them as light as a snake.
Sandalwood and camphor they abandoned.
Their bodies burnt like fire
Which doubled after Krishna's departure.
It consumed their minds.
They had an experience,
Worse than death.

The deer-eyed gopis looked madly
In all directions. Some fell to the ground,
Crying. "O Krishna!"
Many were breathless ; they could
Neither stand nor sit.
Some were sweating and hugging
Each other, their hair disheveled.
An air of helplessness could be seen
On each face.

They could not cry aloud,
Though they wished for it.
They raised their hands in vain
To embrace the sky.
Reminiscences of Krishna
Filled their minds.
They felt as miserable as a lotus

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When the sun sinks.

Bhagatacharan Das says:
The gopis, disappointed,retreated
To their houses, thinking on
His lotus-feet. They spent their days
And nights mournfully,
Waiting for Krishna's return.

Canto X

[The journey to Mathura starts with Rama and Krishna onboard the chariot. Akrura stops the chariot on the way, and, with Krishna's permission, goes for a dip in Yamuna. What he sees inside the waters is a startling revelation for him. Bewildered, he returns. Raga:*Kalasa*]

With Rama and Krishna in the chariot
Saphala's son drove along
The streets of Gopa. It seemed
Matali, the charioteer, was driving
Sachi's consort or Kama was at war
With the demon king, Sambarasura
Or the moon moving across the sky
Or Krishna sailing a golden vessel
Across the sea of Gopa
Or Lord Jagannath on his journey
To Gundicha temple
Or gods churning the sea.
Among the sounds of horn, flute,
Bugle and trumpet the Lion of Braja
Was on his way to Madhupura.

As soon as they passed Gopa
Kamsa's emissary expressed his desire
To take a dip in Yamuna.
"Well, you may have it," Govinda said,
"But try not to be late."

With folded hands,
Remembering the Wheel-bearer,

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The minster bathed in the river merrily.
What he saw made him spell-bound,
His body shivering all over.

He was astonished to find
The Beloved of Gopa in a great mansion,
His body, looking like a new cloud.
A doubt struck him: was not Krishna,
For fear of Kamsa, hiding there?
If so, what would he tell Kamsa
On his return?

Raising his head aloft
He saw Rama and Krishna standing
On the shore. "Let me check again,"
So saying, he took another dip in the river.

He saw a palace
Shining like crores of suns,
With Krishna seated inside,
A golden crown with seven hoods
On his head.

Wisps of hair on his forehead
Looked like a string of young bumble-bees,
Eager to draw honey from his lotus-face.
He looked like a blue lily.
The pearl on his nose looked like
A star and the moon placed side by side.

His ear-rings shone
Brighter than the sun.
His lips were more radiant
Than a *jaba* flower. A necklace
Of pearls hanging from his conch-like neck
Looked like a flock of storks in flight
Against the backdrop of a dark sky.

In his four hands, each like
The trunk of an elephant, he held

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A conch, a mace, a wheel and a lotus.
His yellow clothes, finely spun,
Looked like the flash of lightning
In the dark clouds.
He had anklets around his feet,
On which there were
Eight divine signs.

He was surrounded by *gandharvis*
Who were singing his glory while *kinnaras*
Were playing the *veena*. Lakshmi and Saraswati
Were invoking him in the presence of Narada
And many other divine figures.
Brahma was saying prayers to Hari
Who was seated on Ananta's head.

Such a sight made Akrura
Shiver like a banana leaf.
He began praying to him.
Bhagata Das too joins the prayer.

Canto XI

[The journey ends. Deciding to spend the night at Madhubana, Krishna declines Akrura's request to be his guest. The minister meets Kamsa and informs him that the mission is complete. Kamsa is glad to hear that Nanda's sons have been captured. Rage:*Kali*]

Pleased with Akrura's prayer,
Krishna withdrew his image from water
Which merged into his being
Like water vapour disappearing
Into a dark cloud.
Bewildered, Akrura soon returned.
To him Govinda said, "O Uncle!
Tell us what you saw in the river
While you drive the chariot."

With polite words
The minister replied, "I saw you

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Inside the water. Omniscient as you are,
Need you ask me that?"
Krishna realised the depth of his devotion.
On his moonlike face
A faint smile appeared.
The chariot picked up speed
And rolled along until it pulled up
Near Mathura city.
Holding Akrura's hand, Krishna said,
"Let's wait a while for my parents
To join us. They are coming
With the cowherd boys carrying gifts."

Very soon the whole party gathered there
With the boys playing the flute
And dancing together.
Akrura said to Krishna, "Come with me
And be my guest tonight.
We will meet Kamsa
When the morning arrives."

Krishna humbly declined the offer,
"Excuse me, uncle!
If Kamsa comes to know of it,
You will incur his displeasure.
Not knowing who I am
He has called me here.
I pity him for his foolhardiness.

We will know his mind
From how he treats us tomorrow.
Let me kill him and restore peace
First, and then, be your guest.
This night we spend at Madhubana.
You may go now."

Tears of joy rolled down
Akrura's face who fell
At his feet before taking his leave.
Then he met the King who,

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Offering him a seat,
Whispered into his ears,
"Is the work done? Have you
Brought Nanda's sons with you?"
Trembling all over,
Akrura respectfully replied,
"O King! As you commanded I have
Brought Nanda and his sons with me.
I came here to inform you of it.
Now you can do whatever you like."

Greatly delighted,
The King offered him money, clothes
And garlands. He ordered his men,
"Leave him at his house
As ceremoniously as you can.
He helped me in capturing my enemy
And bringing an end to all my worry."

Thus he bade farewell to Akrura.
Bhagatacharan Das meditates
On Krishna, his Saviour.

Canto XII

[Kamsa holds a meeting of wrestlers to chalk out plans to slay Rama and Krishna. The wrestlers assure him of accomplishing the task without much effort. The boastful words of the wrestlers make Kamsa happy and satisfied. Raga: *Kafi*]

After his minister left
Kamsa held an urgent meeting
Of the demons. Them, he addressed,
And said, "Listen, O warriors !
Krishna has already arrived.
He is the one who killed Putana
And defeated Kaliya.
He slew the demons I had sent to Gopa:
Shakata, Truna, Baka, Bachha,
Byoma, Sandha and Keshi.

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Now that both the brothers have been trapped,
Tell me how to finish them off.
Do not take them lightly.
Do not forget Krishna had defeated Indra
Whereas his brother had killed
Dhenuka, one of my best warriors.
It scares me, O warriors, tell me
How to kill them."

To which the wicked demons replied,
"O King of Bhoja! Fear not.
Mere boys they are,
Unskilled in warfare.
They will not survive
The power of our blows.
Nor are they princes
Who know the strength of wrestlers.
We will exercise all the sixty-four tactics
Such as *adhana,tadana,sarali,ulatapanchana,*
Muthabanchana and many more,
And wring their necks
As we do to worms. Pray, command us,
O King!

Hearing this, the King said,
"Listen to what I say.
You are right. I know
None can beat you unless luck betrays.
Here is my plan. Deploy Kubalaya
At the Lion Gates;
It will surely trample them to death.
If spared, they will face you
At the second gate. I am confident
You will deal with them
With all your strength. I shall be
On the stage with Devaki and Basudeva.
I will show them how I slay their sons
With my sword. Now, get to work.
Post guards all over the place;
Command them not to allow

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Even a fly to enter.
Nanda and Yashoda will see
How I kill their sons."

The meeting ended on a happy note.
Bhakatacharan Das says:
They are setting a trap
To catch the wind.

CantoXIII

[After dinner at Madhubana Krishna proposes to pay a visit to Mathura city, to which everybody agrees. Led by Rama, they reach there and are greatly impressed by its huge structure. Krishna introduces himself to the gate-keeper and expresses his wish to meet the King. The gate-keeper, respectfully, opens the gates and lets them in. Raga: *Kalyan Ahari.*]

That night Krishna and his friends
Stopped at Madhubana
For food and rest.
They built a shelter from pieces
Of cloths and cooked many dishes.
While Nanda's son was dining
The boys of Gopa sat around
In a circle, like stars
Spread around the moon.

With a mysterious smile
Banamali said, "Let's go and have
A quick view of Mathura city."
At this, all of them came out,
In pairs and hand in hand, which
Evoked laughter in the Lord of the gopis.

Playing various musical instruments :
Bugle, flute and pipe,
They marched on. How blessed
Mathura was to have Krishna
As a visitor ! Rohini's son was leading
From the front. Both the brothers,
While walking , looked as majestic

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As heavenly elephants.

The peacock's feather,
Adorning Krishna's head, surpassed
The rainbow in beauty. Curls of hair
Dangling on his forehead looked like
A gathering of young bumble-bees.
His eyebrows were like Kama's bow,
Lines of collyrium its string
And his lotus-eyes its arrows.

On the right side of his nose,
Which looked like a *sesame* flower,
He wore a round pearl, looking as if
The sun was sitting in the moon's lap.
His ear-rings glittered like the sun
And cheeks dazzled like love-god's mirror.

His lips of *jaba* colour
Added to the beauty of his lotus-face,
Which would easily hypnotise
Young women. His pearl necklace
Looked like a flock of storks in flight.
His hands, looking like elephant's trunk,
Touched his knees.

His yellow robe flashed like
Lightning, the girdle adding to its beauty.
His thighs stood like banana trees.
His feet were adorned with anklets
Which, with every step,tinkled.

Rama and others too were finely dressed.
It appeared as if Indra was leading
A procession, flanked by gods,
Glamourising the whole earth.
Or King Kama was on his quest.
It captured the hearts and minds
Of the onlookers as if
They were under a spell.

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They stopped at the gates of the city
And were amazed by its huge ramparts
And copper doors with iron latches.
It was heavily guarded;
The flag fluttering atop created awe
In men, gods and demons.
Greatly impressed by the massive doors,
Krishna was full of praise for Kamsa,
"Uncle Kamsa must be very lucky
To live in such a place. A crow,
Kept in a golden cage and fed with milk,
Fails to enjoy itself, rather is always
On the lookout for a route of escape.
Such is Kamsa, not able to relish
The pleasures of Madhupura.
He would leave it only when
The wheel of death turns on him,

As a wise man is not appreciated
By the wicked, or the Vedas by
The blockhead, or a husband
By an unfaithful wife,
Or banana by a swine,
Or the *jajna*-site by a dog,
The joy of Madhupura is not savoured
By the imperious Drumila's son.

It is his misfortune
To invite me here, thus digging
His own grave. Let him enjoy
All his wealth for tonight.
Tomorrow he will lose everything
When Ugrasena will replace him."

Turning to the gate-keeper, he said,
"Convey our good wishes to the King.
Tell him we have come from Braja
To meet him. We will tell him how we are.
We are innocent and tender in age.
So we are a bit scared."

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The gate-keeper replied,
"Why do you belittle yourself?
Whether someone is big or small
Depends on how wise he is.
We know your strength and wisdom.
Even Shiva, Lord of lords,
Cannot be your match."

Saying so, he opened the gates
And let them in.
Krishna rushed inside, followed by
Others who were playing music
All along.The city of Mathura
Began to throb with life.
Bairagi Bhagatacharan says:
My mind is occupied by
Krishna's visit.

Canto XIV

[On hearing the news of Krishna's arrival, the people of Mathura pour into the street to see him. The women, leaving their household chores, gather there while gods in heaven keep a close watch on the proceedings on the earth. Raga:*Kali*]

As if a frenzied elephant
Was approaching slowly.
To see him, crowds of people
Poured into the street.
One of the women was whispering
To her friend, "O dear! Let's have
An eyeful of the beauty
Of the Lord of gopis. It was he
Who took Putana's life,
Slew Shakata, Baka and Truna,
And uprooted the *arjuna* tree.
He plucked lotus in the lake
By punishing Kaliya, and lifted
Govardhan with his finger.
We had heard of him,
But had never seen. Now

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You can see him as long as you can."

A passionate woman was observing him
Intently. When Banamali's eyes fell on her
She turned dumb, hit by Kama's darts.
Her audacity vanished,
And the clothes over her breasts
Got soaked with beads of sweat.

A merry wife,
While playing dice with her husband,
Heard of Krishna's arrival.
Leaving the game,
She rushed to the street
With the speed of lightning.

While bathing with her friends
In Yamuna, a woman came to know
Of Krishna's coming. Half-bathed,
She ran along the shore.
Particles of sand sprinkled over
Her body looked like crushed camphor
Spread over the golden earth.
Her swelling breasts looked
Through her wet clothes, as if
Shiva *linga* was hiding
There for fear of Kama's attack.
She stopped near Rama's younger brother,
And was amazed to see his body,
Like the new cloud dark,
And his face like the lotus.
A lovely woman,
Cross with her husband,
Was biting her *bimba*-like lips.
On hearing of Krishna's arrival
She forgot her anger and began to run,
Asking people on the way
Where to find Govinda.

A sweet-speaking woman,

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While playing the *veena*, got the news
Of Krishna from a friend.
Pushing her *veena* aside,
She rushed to the street.

A lady, her lips as red as *jaba*,
Was engrossed in playing
A stringed musical instrument.
When the news reached her
She hurried away in a state of frenzy.

One was chatting with her lover.
Oblivious of manners, she left him
And ran to the street
To see the Lord of Braja.

Another was having her meal.
In her eagerness to see Krishna
She left it unfinished
And hastened to the street.

A gold-complexioned lady
Was going to fetch water.
She dropped the pitcher,
And hurried to see Nanda's son.

A cuckoo-voiced woman was busy
Teaching her parrot and mynah.
Suddenly she got up and ran outside
To see the Beloved of Braja.

While running one's anklets
Tinkled. One's waist-chain
Became loose and dropped somewhere.
Unmindful of herself,
She was asking others how far
Her beloved had reached.

A moon-faced woman was singing
A *raga*. She got it wrong in the middle

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And made a hasty exit,
Her eyes closed.

One lost her bracelet somewhere.
Least worried,
The lotus-faced one marched along
Looking for Govinda.
A deer-eyed woman, hurrying along,
Had her hair fall to the ground,
It looked like a black cobra playing
On a bed of gold.

While in haste, a *champak*-complexioned
Woman's necklace snapped.
Another woman, her teeth like pearls,
Lost her pearl necklace
Somewhere in the crowd.

One, with thighs like banana trunk,
Was shaking like a leaf
While in a hurry
To see Kanhu.

A woman, so beautiful
As to please Shiva, was busy
Doing her hair. Leaving it
Half-done, she left for the street.

One, her teeth like
Seeds of pomegranate, was standing
At the door, watching outside.
Her heart, like hail-stone, melted
And flowed in a stream to the street.

A doe-eyed woman,
Having lost her way,
Was asking whoever she saw
Where to find *Brahman*.

One, unable to push her way

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Through the crowd, sat down
Where she was, meditating
On Hari, like a *yogi*.

A mirror-faced woman was dressing
Herself before a mirror.
She started running with vermilion
On her cheeks, collyrium on her forehead,
Ear-rings on her nose
And the girdle round her neck.
The anklets she wore on her hands
And bracelets around her feet.
Not heeding her friend's ridicule,
She kept running along the street.

A newly-wed,
No longer bashful, walked along,
Like an elephant
To meet the Flute- bearer.

One was putting on her clothes.
Half-dressed, she left the place.
A dark-haired woman,
On seeing Krishna's dark body,
Began to tremble,
Unmindful of her friends behind,

One's saree dropped
From her chest, making her breasts
Visible. Another woman's bun
Got loose and fell over her back.

One's clothes fell off,
Exposing her thighs.
Another yawned and winked,
Raising her hands above.

One of the gopis, who swelled
Her nose while she spoke, was trying
To draw the attention

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Of Nanda's son.

One was running breathlessly,
Holding onto her breasts
Like Rati walking on the street,
With Kama following her.

Such was the manner in which
The women of Mathura behaved.
As driven by thirst, men run
Madly looking for water,
They ran here and there.

As flies flock to the fire,
So did they throng the place
To see Krishna.
As the flood water stops steady
At the embankments,
So did the moon-faced women
On seeing Krishna.

As a deer feels
When it sees an elephant,
Or lotuses when the sun rises,
Or ants when they find jaggery,
So did the women feel
When they had a vision of Krishna.

Overpowered by Krishna's
Physical charms, Indra and some other
Gods watched him from above
While *gandharvas* danced and sang
In praise of their Beloved.
Brahma invoked him by
Reading out from SamaVeda.

Bhagatacharan Das says:
Having Krishna arrived at Mathura
There was excitement everywhere.

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Canto XV

[Krishna sees the King's washerman on the way and asks him for some of the clothes he is carrying, to which the washerman declines with abusive words. Incensed, Krishna kills him. Then comes the King's dresser who gladly dresses Krishna and others beautifully. Putting on the King's clothes, they reach Sudama's house who welcomes them with love and humility. Raga: *Kafi, Abakasha Brutta.*]

With Srikrishna's arrival,
The earth looked fair.
The beauty of his graceful appearance
Charmed one and all.

Krishna saw the King's washerman
Coming, a bundle of clothes
On his shoulders, led by a man
Blowing a conch, signalling
The crowd to let them pass.

"Wait, brother!"
Krishna called him aloud,
"Listen, I am the King's nephew,
But I do not have good clothes.
Therefore, I ask you to give me some
Of those you carry on your shoulders.

When the King will know it
He will reward you with villages.
We will look like the Kings' nephew,
Putting on the royal dress.
Have no fear;
Only this much I ask for."

Paying no heed to Govinda's words,
The washerman walked on,
As if he was born deaf.
Krishna blocked his way.
"Grab all the clothes from him!"
To his companions he said.

As they advanced,
The washerman protested,

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"Listen, O Nanda's son!
What you say is not true.
In fact, the quality of the Sovereign's
Clothes has caused greed in you.

One has to pass through
What one's fate dictates.
Your fate directs you
To be a low-born cowherd.
You are to eat from a leaf-plate,
Not from a plate of gold.
You will not have good clothes to wear ,
Good food to eat,
Nor a cosy bed to sleep on.
You are counted among beasts, not men.

Where had you been so long?
Your misfortune has brought you to Mathura.
You create serious disturbances
For no reason or rhyme.
Once the King comes to know of it
He will kill you instantly.
Perhaps you think it is Gopa
And, therefore,
You don't change your habits.

How shameless you are
To obstruct me and grab the royal robe!
Allow me to pass
Or I shall be reprimanded.
At the crack of the morning
All of you will die".

Fuming with anger,
Govinda bit his lips.
He rushed to the washerman
And, with his left hand,
Slapped him across his face
That brought his death.
As water dissolves in milk,
So did his soul in Govinda's being.

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The sins of his past life were redeemed
As he died looking at Krishna's face.
He attained salvation which long years
Of meditation failed to achieve.
How lucky he was !
He could have Hari's blessings
By being his adversary.

Seeing the washerman dead,
The cowherd boys gathered there.
Nanda's son opened the bundle,
Chose a pair of clothes for himself,
Leaving the rest for others to share.

Kamsa's daily dresser was passing
That way. Overwhelmed by
Krishna's beauty, he fainted.
Krishna touched his head
And brought him back to senses.
Recovered, he said
"If you please, I shall dress
Each of you nicely."

With a smile Madhava gave him
The clothes which the dresser neatly
Folded and fastened to his lion-waist.
Thereafter, he hung an apron
From his shoulders.
Now his dashing appearance
Entranced the three worlds.

He dressed Rama
Like a white elephant
And others as it suited them.
Highly pleased, Krishna offered him
A boon, which he politely declined,
"I have no wish for wealth,
Power and position. Make me
A bee and place me at your
Lotus-feet." His wish was granted
By the Moon of Gopa.

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Leaving him,
Putana's Enemy went to Sudama,
The gardener in the service of the King,
Who lived nearby.
Seeing Rama and Govinda,
He lay prostrate at their feet.
He was glad that his long-cherished
Desire to serve them
Was going to be fulfilled.

He washed their feet with water
And swallowed some of it
To wash his sins away while his eyes
Flooded with tears of joy.

Overpowered by emotion,
He could hardly utter a word,
His eyes fixed on Krishna's face.
Seeing that, Hari, showed his head
And chest, asking him
For a floral adornment.

At this, the gardener went inside
And came out with flowers
And the garlands he had woven before,
Anticipating their arrival.

Bairagi Bhaktacharan says:
I shall worship Him all my life,
I know no other gods.

Canto XVI

[Sudama adorns Krishna and others with flowers. Kubuja, a hump-backed, ugly woman, anoints him with sandalwood on the condition that he must fulfil her wishes. Krishna's touch transforms her to a beautiful young woman. She asks Krishna to accept her as his wife. Krishna assures her that he will visit her after he kills Kamsa. Raga: *Kedara Kamodee*.]

Sudama began adorning Krishna
By decking his bun with screwpine buds.
His hair-do looked like Rahu sticking out

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His tongue to devour
The moon of Krishna's face.

Next he rolled a garland
Of *bakul* flowers around his bun,
Looking more elegant
Than the rainbow. On the top of it,
He stuck a peacock's feather,
Dazzling like crores of moons.

A string of red flowers
Ran along his back ; they looked like
Red lilies on Yamuna waters.
He adorned his neck
With a garland of jasmine,
Adding beauty to his chest and face.
Such a sight would fill Rambha
With envy.

Next he adorned Rama
And others. Both the brothers now
Looked like wild elephants,
Bedecked with flowers.
Decoration over, Sudama asked
For a boon that was granted soon.
Then both the brothers,
Followed by the boys of Gopa,
Resumed their walk.

The people of Mathura watched them
With joy. The women
Stood along the street shamelessly
Like rows of pictures.

Krishna saw Kubuja coming,
A woman with a humped back.
Her ugly appearance provoked laughter
Among the boys of Gopa.
He told her, "Sister Kubuja!
Show us what you carry with you.
If it is of any use to us

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We keep it. If not,
Take it to King Kamsa."

Casting a side-long glance
On Krishna, she replied,
"I carry sandalwood to anoint
The King. If you like to have it,
No problem. But, O Flute-bearer!
You must promise to give me
What I ask for."

When Hari consented,
She smeared his body with a mixture
Of sandal, camphor, musk and saffron.
She savoured the smell of Govinda's body
While adorning him.
She sprinkled some
On his head and painted his forehead
So beautifully as to embarrass
The Creator.

She drew the picture of a crocodile
On each of his cheeks that looked
Like stars twinkling
Around the moon. In the same way
She anointed Rama and others.

Pleased, the Destroyer of Shakata
Pressed her ribs,
Trying to straighten her.
As he did it,
She turned into a young woman
Of matchless beauty, her eyes
Like blue lilies and face
As attractive as *jaba.*

Her nose was like a *sesame* flower,
Ears like Kama's noose,
Cheeks like a mirror of gold
And voice like that of the cuckoo.

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Her lips were like ripe *bimba* fruit;
Teeth like diamonds,
Throat like a right-handed conch,
And breasts like Shiva *lingas*.

Her round arms looked like
Creepers of gold and fingers
Like *ashoka* buds.
Her waist was as slim as
The middle of digit "four"
And thighs like banana trunks.

Her lovely feet were an attraction
For bees. Observing her own body,
Kubuja thought, "To whom shall I
Offer it? Since it is the gift
Of Nanda's son, it is his claim
To have it. But if he turns down my offer,
I shall surely consign myself to fire."

Giving up her shyness,
She clasped Krishna's arms
And demanded, "O Beloved of Braja!
Now keep your word and grant me
The boon I ask for."
"Tell me your wish," Krishna said.
And she replied,
"Accept me as your wife.
I owe to you my youth and beauty.
See, how I look!
God wants you to eat the fruit
Of the tree you have planted
With you own hands.

If you refuse, it will mean
You are not worthy of it.
Being my maker, keeping my request
Must be your priority." Saying so,
She released Krishna's arms,
But held his apron amorously,

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Making him feel embarrassed.

Krishna cautioned her, "O Woman!
Don't you see I am with my elder brother?
How dare you say this?
Let me first defeat Kamsa
And bring relief to my relatives;
Then I shall call on you.
Meanwhile, you get things ready
To receive me."

Happy to hear those words,
She went away. She embellished
Her house in every possible way,
So that it looked like heaven.

Awaiting Govinda,
She put on her best clothes,
Decorated her bun with jasmine flowers,
Parted her hair in the middle
And made it into curls.
She put vermilion on her forehead
And collyrium on her eyes.

She wore ear-rings,
A nose-ring of gold
And a necklace of pearls.
She drew pictures of leaf
On her breasts and covered
Her waist with fine clothes.

She put on bangles, rings,
And anklets, and making the bed,
She waited for Krishna to come.

Bhaktacharan Das says:
Kubuja gave her heart to Krishna,
Thinking on Him day and night
And preparing herself as Krishna's devotee.

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Canto XVII

[Expressing the desire to see the site of the Bow-festival, Krishna asks the guard to let them in. The guard flares up and scolds him, which provokes Balarama to kill him. Those who come forward to prevent him, are also slain. Going inside, they break the bow and ransack the site of the festival. Raga: *Baradi, Asadha Sukla Banee.*]

The Lord of the Universe walked along.
The earth heaved a sigh of relief,
Presuming that he would put
An end to Kamsa's life.

There were cheers of encouragement
From gods in heaven:
"O Krishna! O Keshaba! O Govinda!
O Madhava! Destroy the sinners
And protect the virtuous.
Glory to you,
O Destroyer of Kshyatriyas!"

Their prayer reached Krishna's ears.
He said to himself, "I must kill Kamsa
Tomorrow and restore peace
To the land. No more shall I let
The noble ones to suffer."

With light steps he walked on
While gods strewed flowers on him.
The sound of flute and pipe
Filled the air, the cowherd boys
Frolicking all around.
Some were playing with sticks,
Others displaying the cowherd dance,
Still others whistling merrily.

One, in a turban, was walking
Like a wild elephant.
Another was sporting his garland
Of *kaincha* beads.
One of them was waving his pigtail

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Proudly. Another had a bell
Hung from his waist
Which jingled musically.

One was dressed in yellow,
Another in light blue,
Someone in red and someone else in black.
All were following Govinda n the march.

With Rama and Krishna in the middle
The noisy procession went on
Until they reached the festival-site.
The gates were heavily guarded,
Not allowing even a fly to pass.

Rama and Krishna called aloud,
"Listen, O guards!
We are the King's nephews.
The King holds the Bow festival
For our pleasure.
So make way for us.
We will see the bow,
That much we ask for."

The guards flared up
Like a snake when someone had trod
On its tail. They shouted at him,
"Now we will show you
How nephews are to be treated.
O stupid cowherds !
How dare you speak such bold words!

Don't you know King Kamsa's power?
How dare you create such nuisance here,
Looting his clothes, cosmetic and flowers,
And using them for your pleasure!
Moreover, you want to see the bow.
How stupid you are!
You will see what happens to you
Tomorrow." Saying so, they brandished

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Their swords to obstruct their way.
Unable to consume the insult,
The wrathful Rohini's son rushed forward
And dealt them thunderous blows
That knocked them flat.

Some fell dead;
Others took to their heels.
With none to resist, they reached
The place where the bow lay proudly.
Kamala's consort picked it
And pulled its string. It cracked
And broke with a sound, deafeningly loud.

The whole place was soon ransacked,
Its decorations disfigured
And fixtures dismantled
By the boys of Gopa.
With the broken bow,
Both the brothers came out
To face another set of guards
Who appeared before them
As death's messengers.

Balarama, the *kadambari*-taker,
Thrashed them to death
With the broken bow. Thereafter,
They came to the street to find
The women of Mathura
Waiting anxiously.

On their return to Madhubana
Their parents took them into their laps
And kissed them affectionately.
They changed their clothes
And gave them food to eat.

Then they lay on the bed,
Looking like new clouds
Over a sea of milk.

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Keeping the flute under the pillow.
Soon they fell asleep.
Bhaktacharan says:
I caressed Krishna's feet all night.

Canto XVIII

[The messengers report to Kamsa on Krishna's misconduct with regard to the killing of the washerman and the guards and the snatching away of the clothes, flowers and cosmetic belonging to the King. The news scares Kamsa. He thinks it unwise to rely on his warriors who seem to be unable to protect him. The warriors, however, succeed in prevailing upon him not to worry. Raga : *Kanada*.]

After Krishna fell asleep
All others went to bed.
Meanwhile, messengers told Kamsa
How the washerman was killed
And how the flowers and cosmetic
Were forcibly taken away.

They said, "O King!
Nanda's sons have broken the bow
And killed our guards.
Our warriors challenged them
But were soon overpowered."

Drumila's son fell silent
For a moment, then asked them
To tell more, who elaborated
On Govinda's misdemeanour.

Kamsa was panicked.
He thought,
"Surely they will kill me.
Why did I call them here,
And dig my own grave?
Now the power of those on whom
I rely has been exposed.

It is beyond my comprehension

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How could these boys cause
So much damage. What made
Our warriors too scared to face
Them? All their tall talks
Have been proved false.

They sport their strength
In times of peace. At the sight
Of the enemy, they run away.
What epithets shall I confer on
These kshyatriyas who are
As frightened as thieves
In the battle-field?

Those who fail to perform
Their duty are called eunuchs,
Whom the whole world condemns.
O what a fool I have been
To trust them all these years!

Tomorrow I shall fight single-handed.
Let the night pass off peacefully.
I shall kill Rama and Krishna
With my own hands.
Did I take anyone's help
To conquer heaven and the earth?"

Burning with anger,
The wicked demon breathed furiously.
Brandishing his sword
And looking sternly around,
He began to shake violently.

To pacify Kamsa's wrath
The warriors said, "O King!
Do not worry. Command us
And see what we are doing.
It will be a fight between two unequals.
They are *night jasmine*.
We are twelve suns.
They are a heap of ash,

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We are the storm.
They are *sirisa* flowers,
We are heavy showers.

They killed the washerman
Who did not know how to defend
Himself. So was the gardener.
Kubuja was a stupid woman
Who could be easily overcome.

They could break the bow
As it was old and weak.
There is no point to be
scared. O King! Let's see
How they escape from us tomorrow.

We will toss them in the air
And crash them to the ground.
All your fear will come to an end.
Moon, Sun, Indra, Shiva,
Brahma, Baruna and Agni—
None will be able to defend them.

Therefore, be calm and wait
Till tomorrow. Be assured,
The enemy will be wiped out.
O King! Post the mahout at the gates
And start the ceremony at the earliest."

Kamsa felt relieved, believing
In what the warriors said.
Bairagi Bhagatacharan says:
Kamsa, after a good supper,
Retired happily to bed.

Canto XIX

[Instructing Krishna to follow them, Nanda and Yashoda meet Kamsa with gifts. Welcoming them with great joy, Kamsa tells the kings that Basudeva has played foul with him by hiding his son in Gopa. He swears to kill Rama

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and Krishna in the presence of their parents and, then, send the latter to the gallows. He commands his warriors to remain alert and kill Rama and Krishna mercilessly. Raga: *Bangalashree*]

With the cooing of cuckoos
The night passed.
From the nearby Shiva temples
The sound of conch was heard.

Crows cawed and cocks crowed ;
It was light everywhere.
The womenfolk left their beds, blushing.
The noise of human voices
Filled the air.

The pious flocked
To Yamuna for a dip.
Thieves, lechers, owls and other
Nocturnal animals were afraid
Of day-light.

The sun rose in the east;
Lotuses began to bloom.
Lilies waned
With the disappearance of the moon.

Krishna, God of gods,
Got up from his ivory bed,
His drowsy face looking like
A half-open lotus.

Unsteadily he walked,
A smile on his red lips.
His sleepy eyes
Looked like blue lilies.
Both the brothers washed
Their faces with scented water.
Putting on golden sandals
They reached the place of bath
Where they cleaned their teeth

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And washed themselves.
After scrubbing their bodies
With dry cloth, they were anointed
With sandalwood paste, that made them
Look like painted idols.

Krishna was dressed
In yellow silk that looked like
Lightning held steady
In the lap of dark clouds.

The peacock's feather
Stuck to his bun was lovelier
Than the rainbow. The beauty
Of his garland of *kaincha* seeds
Would surely make Kama's heart melt.

Curls of hair on his forehead
Looked like young bumble-bees.
His eyebrows were like Kama's bow,
His eyes the arrows and the line
Of collyrium its string.

His nose was more beautiful
Than a *sesame* flower.
His ears were Kama's noose;
The ear-rings resembled a crocodile
Which glittered more than the stars,
Brihaspati and *Sukra*.

He had a ring on his nose.
His gem-studded necklace, bracelets
And armlets shown brighter
Than the sun.
He had a girdle, *odiani*,
fitted with bells.
His anklets tinkled
As he walked. He had
Moonlike fingernails.

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An apron on his shoulders,
He held his flute *Mohana* in his hands.
Rama and others were adorned
With ornaments and fine clothes.

They took their food
And chewed betel
When Rama instructed everybody
To get ready to leave.

Hari told his parents,
"Let's get the milk-pots ready
And proceed to the city.
We should meet the king
When the time is auspicious."

Meanwhile, Kamsa's emissary
Reached there with the King's order,
Asking Nanda to come with him.
While leaving, Nanda told Krishna
And others to follow him.

Nanda and Yashoda
Met the King with loads of gift.
Filled with joy, Kamsa ordered his men,
"Receive the gifts and make
These two sit on the stage
Near Basudeva.

How carefully he had been bringing up
Basudeva's sons in secret!
Now that he surrenders them to me
I pardon him for his mistake.
He who brought them up will now see
How I kill his sons.
Let Basudeva and Devaki, my sister
Witness my heroic act."

Then turning to the assembly,

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He said, " O kings! Listen.
In a plan to kill me, Basudeva had kept
His son, my enemy, in Nanda's house.
I never thought he would be
So devious. I got to know it only
By using my yogic powers.

Now all of them have been captured.
I shall kill the children in the presence
Of their parents and send these four
To the gallows. Then I shall celebrate
My victory over my foes."

To the warriors he addressed thus,
"Dress up Kubalaya, the great tusker
And deploy it at the Lion Gates.
O mahout! See that it tramples
Both the brothers to death.
Do not show any mercy to them
On the ground that they are underage."
Then he commanded the wrestlers,
"Remain alert at the second gate.
In case they escape from Kubalaya,
Engage them in wrestling
And finish them off."

Now it was all set.
Each took note of the King's instructions
And got ready for the occasion.
Bhakta Das says:
It is like jackals planning
To hunt a lion.

Canto XX

[The women of Mathura crowd the street to see Krishna about whom they have heard so much. The procession led by Rama and Krishna stops at the Lion Gates of Mathura city where they are confronted by Kubalaya, the great tusker. They request the mahout to remove the elephant from there and let them in. Raga: *Asadha Sukla*.]

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Among sounds of flutes and horns.
Mohana walked along the street of Mathura.
The scene reminded one of Kama
On his march to fight with Sambara.

As flies rush to fire
The women hurried to the street
To have a glimpse of Krishna.
The whole of yesterday they spent
Waiting for that fateful moment,
Abandoning food and slumber.

Their modesty
Breached like a sand-wall,
Through which their joy,
Like flood water, gushed out,
Washing away
Their husbands and children
Like wood and grass,
Which they could not help.

Be they wives, daughters, sisters,
Mothers and aunts – all rushed
To the street like Rati in a tearing hurry
To join Kama.

Their joy knew no bounds
When they saw Krishna.
They were as exalted as a female swan
Meeting her male
Or a she-elephant seeing her partner
Or lilies when the moon appeared
Or lotuses when the rays of the sun
Fell on them.

They were in groups,
Their eyes fixed on Krishna.
Wounded by Kama's arrows
They were spellbound;
Their bodies trembled.

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The moon-faced women were surely
Bewitched by Shyama.

One of them said, " O dear!
One look at him,
And you cannot take your eyes off.
It seems God has created him
Only to captivate women.
The way he looks at us hits us
As hard as Kama's goad."

Another woman remarked,
"Kama was burnt alive by Lord Shiva.
To his good luck, he got back
His life after many years.
But, for fear of Shiva,
He could not find a place to settle.
I think, he has reappeared
As Krishna to enchant us."

Her friend interrupted,
"No. This is not true.
Crores of Kama cannot be
Krishna's equal.
All are afraid of him ;
The yogis leave their meditation
At the sight of Kama.
He makes everyone mad—
From insects to *Brahman*.

Nanda's son is different.
He is Chintamani, the Redeemer
Of sorrows. He assumes
The shape his devotees desire.
He fulfills all wishes.
In comparison to Kama
He is far nobler."

Begging to differ, another woman said,
"Krishna has all the attributes of Kama,

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Like him he is armed.
To hide his identity he came
As a boy, changing his name
From Kama to Shyama.
The only difference,
He has no Rati with him.

His eyebrows are like Kama's bow
The tuft of hair hanging along his back
Its string; his face is the lotus ;
Eyes are the blue lilies, his crown
The mango bud, lip is the *ashoka*
And teeth are the jasmine flowers.
All these symbolize
Kama's five arrows.

Among other weapons,
Krishna's ears are Kama's noose
And ear-rings the wheel that tears
The crocodile of a woman's heart.
His wink is the archer's ring,
His nose an unsheathed sword,
Cheeks are mirrors and lips
Like *jaba* flowers.

His throat resembles a conch ;
His braided hair and tongue
Are snake-arrows,
His hands are ropes, finger-nails
Are spears and his gait,
Like a club, pierces
The hearts of young women
With the passion of love.

Those weapons he uses against us.
As a *kumbhakar* wasp
Kills its prey and revives it later,
He makes us senseless first,
Then revives us into life
With his nectar-like words."

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Challenging her friend's arguments,
Another woman said,
"How stupid you are!
You jump into conclusions
Before the time is ripe.
Can you have sex with your husband
In his absence? How ridiculous!
You dare edit a *pothi,*
Not knowing the alphabets!

You claim yourself a pilgrim
Without making a pilgrimage.
Having no money in your hands
You sink a well. Though sterile,
You proclaim you have a son.
Without a pitcher you are going
To fetch water. Being a house-maid
You call a chaste woman a whore.

Do not be silly.
See, how Madana Mohana looks!
Pray to God to have Nanda's son
As the lord of your life.
Pray to Shiva to unite you
With him. Do not leave his company.
Do not shrink. Concentrate
Your mind on him."

An old woman, who was listening
To her, said, "You are right.
How charming he looks!
We are as excited with joy
As minnows when they find
Deep water to swim.

Now I am old and worn out.
My hair has gone grey
And eyesight bad.
My memory has become poor
And body withered. O cruel God!

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How can I savour
These joyful moments?

Had I been young
I would have offered myself to him.
As a mother knows her child's mind
Kama only knows
What is going on in my mind now,

Have a look at Srrishna's face.
It seems a lotus has bloomed
On the surface of water.
From his *bimba*-like lips
Words drip like honey,
Attracting the bees.
We are fortunate to avail ourselves
Of such a rare opportunity.

The woman whom he greets with a kiss
Will take great pride in it.
The position of Indra is less rewarding
Than the touch of his cheeks.
Even Kama will hide his face in shame
Observing Krishna's beauty.

The woman he speaks to smilingly
Must be a paragon of beauty.
Look at his round, brawny arms,
Stronger than an elephant's trunk.
The woman he takes in those arms
To bed will have the joy
Greater than that of heaven.
Who will cry for jaggery
When he has nectar with him?

Look at his chest, besmeared with
Musk, sandalwood and camphor.
Its beauty casts a spell
On the onlooker,
Even if he is his foe.

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His embrace will douse
The fire of sex in a woman.
His waist, like a *dambaru,*
Wrapped in yellow robe,
Will surely swell the ocean of her love
With fiery passion.

Look at Shyama's thighs,
Like inverted banana trunks
Made of sapphire. The woman
Who sits on them must be the luckiest
Of all in the three worlds.
Happy is she who caresses
His lotus-feet, drawing them
Close to her bosom.

When this is the feeling
Of an old woman like me,
I can well imagine how restless

You must be. Why did the cruel God
Make me so? Had I been young
I would have rushed to him
And taken his arms
In my firm clasp."

When she stopped a young woman
Said, "Bless us so that
The Darling of Braja accepts us
As his beloved. We need nothing else."
To which the old woman replied.,
"It is not as easy as you guess."

One suggested to make
A pilgrimage to Ganga and Gaya.
Another proposed to visit Prayag
At *Makara*. Someone insisted on

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Going for meditation at Kashi.
Someone, desperately, thought it better
To drown together while someone else
Advised to worship Hara and Gouri
To fulfill their wish.

Thus the women of Mathura
Expressed their feelings.
To a poet like me,
It seemed Kama was leading
Rati as they were led by Krishna, all along.

With their followers dancing
And playing the flutes,
Rama and Krishna reached the Lion Gates.
They were prevented by the mahout
Who asked them to stop shouting.
At this, the dance and the music stopped.

"Why do you stop us?" Krishna asked,
"The King will be displeased
If we are late. Besides the milk
We carry will go stale.
Remove the elephant from here
And allow us to go in."

Bhakta Das says:
O I am shaking in fear.

Canto XXI

[The mahout defiantly turns down Krishna's request. He asks Krishna to push the tusker aside and get in. It resulted in a fight between Krishna and Kubalaya. The tusker chases after Krishna, but he displays *maya* which puts it in utter confusion. Rama comes to his aid and catching its tail, hurls it to a distance, making it fall on its knees. Krishna strokes its head with his flute that brings an end to its life. Then, they go inside where they are confronted by the wrestlers at the second gate. Raga: *Kafi, Abaksha Brutta*.]

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Hearing Krishna's words,
The stupid mahout replied,
"Listen, O Nanda's son!
Aren't you the one who lifted Govardhan,
Killed Sandha, Shakata, Truna,
Keshi, Bachha, Dhenuka, Byoma
And Putana? Aren't you the one
Who destroyed Kaliya's pride?
What scares you, then?
You snatched away the King's clothes,
Cosmetic and flowers. You broke
The bow that boasted of having
The strength of one thousand lions,
To which many are witnesses.
Should such a great warrior
Be afraid of an elephant?
Why don't you push it aside
And get in?"

To whom the Lord of the Universe,
With mild words, replied,
"Thank you for your wise words.
But have you ever seen a man fighting
With an elephant? Besides, as children,
We are scared of horses and elephants.
We lead an humble life,
Grazing cows in the forest.
We live on wild fruits,
And, at home, we have barely anything
To sustain ourselves.
We have no bed, but the floor to sleep on.
Now that we are with our uncle,
We hope our misery will end soon."

The cruel mahout roared out,
"O Sripati! I never thought you would
Stoop so low. Your days at Gopa
Are over. Now think of your own fate.
However you feign innocence,

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I am not going to melt.
Let me warn you; this is not Gopa
Where you play the flute and dance,
Enjoy the company of the gopis in arbours,
Seducing them by bribes
And stimulating words. It is Mathura
Where angels fear to tread.
You create nuisance here,
Not thinking of its eventuality.
I shall get you killed by this tusker.
The king of Bhoja will reward me.
When he hears you are no more."

Staring at the mahout sternly,
Krishna told him, "Well, well.
Let's see how mighty your Kubalaya is!"
Saying so, he tucked his flute
Into his waist and got ready
To face the brute.

"Catch him!. Catch him!"
The mahout shouted as he struck
At Kubalaya with the goad.
With a loud trumpet, the tusker
Raised its trunk, sticking out its tusks,
Its eyes as red as fire.
The earth began to shake.
When it rushed towards Krishna
From behind, it looked as if a hare
Or a goat was running fancifully
After a lion. The poor fellow
Did not know who he was trying
To kill was the one who holds
The universe in him; the sun and the moon
Are his eyes, the sky his head,
Himalaya his waist
And the nether world his feet.

Each strand of his hair
Is a mountain; each breath a tempest.

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He is friend to those who are upright,
But Yama to the wicked.
He is compassionate to his devotees
And most loved by women.
One can expiate his sins
Chanting his name.
Ignorant of Krishna's might,
It was challenging him to a fight.

Nanda's son began to run,
The tusker behind him. Suddenly,
Krishna spread his *maya,*
Like a magician doing a performance,
Which, to a common man, appeared real.
Feigning extreme fatigue,
Krishna slowed down his pace.
Seeing it, the mahout shouted,
"Get him! He is exhausted!"
As Kubalaya lowered its tusks
To lift him he dodged
And lay prone on the ground.
But, in the next moment
He was not to be found.
Bewildered, the mass of women
Gathered there looked like
A sea being churned.

One of them muttered a curse
At Brahma, the creator, for being
So unkind to Krishna, to let him
Be killed by a tusker.
Another suspected
He was gored to death
While someone else suggested,
"Let's leave this sinful land
And jump into fire. It is better to be
Burnt to death than to see
Ghanashyama in such a plight."

A woman added,
"How will his mother take it

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When we cannot bear the sorrow?
Overcome by intense grief,
She will surely set herself to fire."

To which her friend responded,
"Pity on her! Why was he not born
To us?" There was another woman
Who said, "It cannot be helped.
How can she refuse
The dictates of her fate?"

One guessed
The tusker had devoured him.
Another suspected him to be inside
Its mouth. One said he was kicked
To a distance. Another thought he escaped
Unseen. One of them wondered,
"Why is Kubalaya turning round and round?
Hasn't it got him yet?"

The deep concern of the gopis
Was felt by Krishna
Who appeared instantly under its belly.
Excited by human smell,
It trumpeted loudly.
The women cheered," Look, friends!
There he is! He will kill Kamsa, for sure.
Let's pray to God for his safety."

Krishna got up and started to run,
The tusker following him all the way.
After a long chase
It could not run further.
Meanwhile, Krishna displayed his *maya*.
Wherever Kubalaya looked
It found Krishna there.
Confused, it moved round and round
Like a wheel.

Just then, Rohini's son

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Attacked it from behind
Like a lion pouncing on a deer
Or Garuda swooping on a snake.
At Krishna's instruction,
He caught its tail with his left hand
And hurled it in the air
It fell on its knees
Four hundred hands away.

Krishna rushed forward
And struck its forehead with his flute
That caused its death.
Being killed by Krishna, its soul
Dissolved in him. How fortunate
Kubalaya was to achieve salvation
So easily, for which Brahma
Had been meditating for ages!

Seeing Kubalaya dead,
The mahout, in fury, raised
His sword to strike Krishna,
Who pulled out one of its tusks
And pierced it into the mahout's body
Which fell lifeless.
The women watching it rejoiced;
The cowherd boys danced merrily.
Gods in heaven strewed flowers
On Krishna as if thanking him.

Followed by their dancing companions,
Both the brothers advanced towards
The festival site unopposed.
Now all eyes were on Krishna
Who was dancing and playing his flute.
He looked more handsome than Kama
And as bright as *kanasiri* flowers.

The peacock's feather on his head
Exceeded the rainbow in loveliness.
The curls of hair on his forehead

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Looked like bumble-bees
Swarming around his lotus-face.

He had a pearl on his nose
And rings on his ears.
A betel in his mouth, he wore
A necklace studded with *Kaustuva*.
He was dressed in yellow,
Wearing armlets and anklets.

Everyone stood up.
A wave of joy swept all over.
To the young and the old he appeared
As a child, to women as Kama
To the wise as Sripati, to his devotees
As Nanda's son and as Yama to the wicked.
Depending on their wishes
He looked different
To different persons.

Kamsa was scared;
The boastful wrestlers fell silent.
Recovering, they shouted at Rama and Krishna
To stop for a moment.

Turning to them, Krishna said,
"Why do you shout so loudly?
Don't you know it frightens us?
We do not mind facing our equals,
But we avoid the stronger ones,"

The wrestlers burst into laughter.
They said, "O Nanda's son!
Why do you lie to us ?
For the strong ones, actions speak
Louder than words. Can a flower
Conceal its fragrance?
The muscles on your body show
You are skilled in war.

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Let's have a try. The reputation
Of kshatriyas is enhanced by showing
Their prowess in war, not by
The years they have lived."

Krishna smiled at them. Rubbing
His feet on the ground, he replied,
"We are not king's sons.
How can we learn martial arts?
You are professional wrestlers
Hired by the King. We are cowherds,
Eating rice from a leaf plate,
Mixing it with water.
To beautify ourselves, we smear
Saffron soil on our body.
How can we be wrestlers?"

Enraged, Chanura, one of the wrestlers,
Spoke," O Basudeva's son!
You were hiding in Gopa so long.
Now you cannot get away.
We will bring an end to Kamsa's worries
By killing his arch-enemy."

The son of Braja answered,
"You may be right,
But as children, we do not discriminate
Between friends and foes.
It will be unjust on your part
To take on children like us.
You are as huge as a mountain;
You scare men and gods.
We are no match; you need
To fight with your equals."

Chanura, the wicked, cried out,
"Hold him, don't let him go.
He has killed Sandha, Shakata,
Putana and many others.
He dares make fun with us!

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Look at the warrior's bell at his waist!"
So saying, he held Krishna's hands
Firmly. Encouraged, Mustika
Rushed to Balarama and caught him
While gods in heaven watched
All this anxiously.

It gave rise to a fierce battle
That shook the earth.
Realising Krishna's formidability,
They were looking for a piece of dry land
In the fathomless sea.
The demons felt they had jumped into fire
Or built a fence of cotton wool
To prevent a storm. They thought
They were *sirisa* flowers
Daring the thunder.

Bhakta Das says:
How foolish the wrestlers are !

Canto XXII

[A fierce battle ensues between Krishna and Chanura, ending with the demon's death. Mustika, another wrestler challenging Balarama, is also killed. Several other warriors who rush in, seeking revenge, have to lay down their lives. Reaching the site of the festival, Krishna mounts the stage and holds Kamsa by the hair. His eyes fixed on Krishna, Kamsa breathes his last before any fight can begin. Raga: *Ahari*]

A terrible battle ensued
Between Krishna and Chanura;
The earth shook in horror.
Realising Krishna's strength
The demon knew
That his days were numbered.
"Why did I obey the King's order?"
He thought,
"Krishna's wrath is a roaring fire
Which will burn me like grass."

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If I back out now,
The kings will reproach me.
If I die in the battle
I shall settle in heaven happily."
With this in mind, he fought
To the best of his effort.
The sound of the exchange of blows
Deafened the three worlds.

Holding each other by the arm
They fought violently:
Head to head, chest to chest,
Thigh to thigh and foot to foot,
Falling on the ground
And rising again.
Their breath sounded like a storm,
The push of their bodies
Produced fire.

All the promises
He had made to Kamsa
Were proven false.
Like a chaste woman under a spell
Chanura was charmed
By Krishna's touch.
He was as terrified as a grass snake
When it saw a wild mongoose in front.
As a snake when face to face with Garuda
Or a goat before a tiger
Or an ass confronting an elephant
Or a rabbit attacked by a lion
Or a mouse fighting with a cat
Such was Chanura's plight
While he encountered Krishna.

Can a stork and a bumble-bee look the same?
Can a small river be compared with an ocean?
Can a common bird be equal to an eagle?
Or any king to Indra ?
Similarly, the wicked demon
Was no match for Krishna.

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He felt he was losing his strength
Gradually as the battle went on.

The people of Mathura whispered
To each other, " Never have we seen
Such a cruel king as Kamsa.
What will he gain
By killing Nanda's sons?
If God be true, nothing will happen
To Rama and Krishna,
And Kamsa will die in their hands."

The anxious parents,
Watching the frightful sight
From the stage, were saying,
"O God ! If our sons come out unhurt,
We promise to give donations
To the poor and feed brahmins
To their satisfaction." While saying so,
Their eyes were flooded with tears.

To relieve his parents and well-wishers
Of their anxiety, Krishna landed a blow
On the wicked demon's head,
With a thunderous noise. Awe-struck,
The warriors felt as if King Yama
Had descended to the earth.

Govinda's blow was too hard
For Chanura to bear, who lay on the ground
Unconscious, bleeding profusely.
But suddenly he got up
And dealt a severe blow
On Gopinath's head.

The blow was like a bunch of flowers
Hurled at a wild elephant.
He held the demon's right hand
And turning him round and round
In the air,
Crashed him onto the floor.

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Thus Chanura died.
His soul dissolved in Krishna.
He would have died any day,
But by being killed as Krishna's enemy
He went to heaven.

Seeing Chanura's death,
Rohini's son, in fury, delivered
A blow that hit Mustika to death.
Thus his soul was redeemed,
His sins washed away.

Both the brothers did not have
A moment of respite. Kukkuta,
Another wrestler, dealt Rama
With a fierce blow,
The return blow brought his end.
The same fate befell
Those who came next.

Seeing his wrestlers falling
One after another, Kamsa
Flew into a rage and ordered his men,
"Send Yashoda, Nanda, Basudeva
And Devaki to the gallows immediately.
Slay all the Jadavas. I shall deal with
Rama and Krishna all by myself."

Hearing this,
Hari jumped onto the stage
Like a tiger pouncing on a deer
Or Garuda swooping on a snake
Or a snake catching a frog.
Seeing Krishna approaching him
Kamsa got ready
To face him with his sword.

Furious, Krishna caught him
By the hair with his left hand.
While looking into Krishna's face

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Kamsa breathed his last.
He got *nirvana*, his sins pardoned.

With Kamsa's dead body
Krishna jumped from the stage like a lion.
Sitting on him, like a bumble-bee
On a stork, he cried out, "O uncle!
Leave me now.
I am your sister's son."

Krishna and his friends danced
In joy while gods strewed flowers
From above. The *gandharvas* sang
And the *kinnaras* danced, Baiswanara
Displayed his flames
And the wind blew slow.
The *vidyadharas* rejoiced
While Brahma sat in prayer.
The earth heaved a sigh of relief.
Baruna, Kubera, Aruna
And Moon cheered, free from fear.

Like Shiva, Krishna danced *tandaba.*
His face, as hard as thunder so far,
Now turned as soft as a lotus.
Govinda had saved the gods
From disgrace and dishonour.

Bairagi Bhakatacharan Says:
People considered Krishna
Their only treasure.

Canto XXIII

[Some of Kamsa's supporters surround Krishna to avenge the King's death, but are soon overpowered and killed. When the news reaches the queens they run to the spot to find their husband lying lifeless. They wail and weep, ruminating over their glorious past. Krishna, feigning innocence, offers consolation to them. At night they leave for their father's house and brief their father, Jarasandha, how such a misfortune has befallen them. Raga: *Desakshya. Madhupa Chautisha Brutta.*]

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Seeing Kamsa dead,
The kings beat a hasty retreat,
Except Kanka, Dhanka, Shakrajit
And Mahasen who surrounded
Rama and Krishna,
Seeking revenge.

Like Indra who destroyed Brutra
In a fierce battle,
Rama, with his unweildy, iron mace,
Hammered all to death.

Learning from others
That the King was now no more,
The queens left the palace
And hurried to the spot
Where their husband lay lifeless.

Taking him into their laps
They wailed and wept,
Kissing his face and moaning,
"O husband!" again and again.

One by one, they recounted
Their happy past while fondling
His nose, ears and fingers.
Some of them collapsed,
Unable to bear the loss.

Pointing at the dead body,
The chief queen said,
"I find no wound on his body.
How did Nanda's son kill him?"

Another queen replied,
How did he kill Putana?
The same way Yashoda's son
Has killed the Lord of our life."

They wept bitterly,

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Breaking their bangles
And tearing their hair.
Now they looked as ugly
As trees in summer.

One of the queens fell to the ground,
Crying "O my husband!"
Beating her breast, Another queen
Cried out, "O my Lord!
O King of Mathura!" Saying so
She pulled the dead king towards her.

The chief queen lamented,
"For what fault of ours
God has punished thus?
What did He gain by making us
Widows while we are young ?
We would not bear his absence
Even for a moment
And watch his way
From a distance.
With his departure all our happiness
Is gone forever. Can a tree,
Once cut, come to life again?
None in the three worlds would be
As unfortunate as we are.
What is the use of remaining alive?
Why didn't I die with my husband?
O Lord of kshatriyas!
Why don't you listen ?
Your heart must be harder
Than thunder. Why don't you speak
As sweetly as before?

You conquered kingdoms
Without having to fight.
You made gods destitute.
At the twang of your bow,
The mightiest warriors flee.
Your fame spreads across

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The three worlds, whom King of Death
Fears. The earth trembles
When you walk on it.
Now all is lost!
How could a child take your life
Before there could be any fight?
O how disgraceful it is !"

Thus the grief-stricken demon's wife wept.
Drawing Kamsa's hand
Close to her bosom
The youngest queen cried and said,
" O Creator of the Universe !
Why did you do this ?"

Thus she cried and said,
"You are the greatest
Of the kshatriyas, whom Indra fears.
What a misfortune to see
A python reduced to a grass-snake!"

You took our words amiss.
You never listened to the advice
Of your ministers.
Those boys were in Gopa.
Why did you bring them here
By sending a messenger?

The demons you sent to kill Krishna
Were killed by the two brothers.
Knowing it fully well,
You brought them here.
How did you ignore
Their strength?

A snake may be small
And confined to its hole.
But at the approach of a frog
It comes out of the hole,
Raising its hood
And bites it. Similarly

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Nanda's son left his house
To take his uncle's life.

With whom will we play dice?
Who will we anoint with sandalwood paste?
Who will we wait and watch,
Standing at the doorway?

For whom will we cook delicious dishes?
Who will we feed with our hands?
To whom will we offer sweet betel
And take care of his clothes?
Who will we fan?
For whom will we make the bed?
In whose lap will we sit merrily?
With whom will we exchange jokes
And spend the night happily ?

Whose head will we adorn with flowers?
Who will we decorate with necklaces?
Never again will we have
Such privilege. Once most loved,
We are now the most neglected.

Who will offer us fine clothes
And ornaments?
Who will get us anything we ask for,
Even if it is rare ?

Wearing a sad face,
We would spend our time mournfully.
We would not put on
Coloured clothes.
Without them we would look
Like trees in summer.

Why are you so silent?
Why don't you listen to us?
Why are you so cruel
As to leave us behind?

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A look at your beautiful,
Moon-like face used to fill us
With joy, which is now no more.
We are destined to suffer
Hence forward.

Without you
Mathura looks desolate.
Where are all your warriors gone?
Did you leave for Yama's abode
With friends, elephants and all your men?"

The queens and their attendants
Let out a wail, each of them
Praising the deceased.
It filled the Flute-bearer
With pity, who, bearing a sad look,
Reached his aunts.

Feigning innocence,
He wiped his eyes and cried out,
"O cruel God! For what cause
You punished him thus?
O my aunts! Why do you weep?
The loss is mine. I missed
My valiant uncle forever.
Now where do we go?
He passed away.
Leaving me in the dark.

I spent my days in a house
That belonged to someone else.
We lived the life of a cowherd,
Not having enough to eat.
Alas! such a misfortune was written
In our fate!

I had a secret desire to visit
My uncle's house when I grew up,
I hoped that my misery would end

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And I shall live happily thereafter.
It is my bad luck
That did not make it happen.

I came here with a dream
That did never come true.
How unlucky I am
To see my aunts as widows
And all their woe !
Volumes can be said
On my uncle's benevolence.
He held my parents in captivity.
In addition, he killed
Six of my brothers ruthlessly.

Scared, my father shifted me
Secretly to Nanda's house.
As soon as the news reached my uncle
He sent Putana to greet me.

Next came Shakata,
Followed by Truna, Baka,
Agha and Bachha, In obedience
To their King's command, they came,
One by one, to locate me.

Can I ever repay his debt?
It is my good luck that I got him
As my uncle. He has many other
Attributes that I can highlight,
But is there anyone to listen?

While in Nanda's house
My uncle, out of love, sent Akrura
To fetch me here, so that
I can enjoy a better life hereafter.

In order to test his nephew's strength
The King posted an elephant

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At the Lion Gates. The tusker
While chasing after me, fell and died.
But everybody said I was to be blamed.
When the King came to know of it
He engaged me in a fight
With his wrestlers.

All of them lost their lives
For their own mistakes.
The King celebrated my victory
With sounds of music.
As I was standing below the stage
I thought it unwise to pay respect
To my uncle from there, that too,
Before so many subordinates.

Considering myself
The nephew of a King
Whom Indra fears,
I mounted the stage
Where my uncle held me
In deep embrace.
I was scared
And drew myself aside.
While taking me into his lap,
Both of us fell down.
Drumila's son must have a delicate body,
For which he lost his life
As soon as he fell to the ground.

I have been a victim of circumstances.
O my aunts! Your loss is negligible.
He died as a result of the conspiracy
Of gods who envied
His glory and wealth.

I must have committed the sin
Of snatching someone's food
Or breaking the Shiva *linga*,
For which, I became an orphan
Without my uncle."

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Seeing Krishna in tears,
All felt sorry for him
While the queens stopped crying,
Leaving the dead body.

Some were scared of him,
Others compromised
With what had happened,
Still others felt happy and relieved
Watching his graceful appearance.

The queens retired to the palace,
Remembering their departed husband.
It was Nanda's son
Who cremated his body
In the funeral pyre.

He made Ugrasena the new king
And released his parents
From captivity. Sending off
Nanda and Yashoda to Gopa,
He stayed back there.

Displaying his cosmic playfulness
He stayed there with his brother.
A few days later he paid a visit
To Kubuja, as promised before.

He made Ugrasena
The King of Mathura.
In the darkness of the night
The unhappy queens left for the kingdom
Of Jarasandha, their father.
They told their parents
About how their husband passed away.

Bairagi Bhakatacharan says:
It was Nanda's son
Who did it.

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Canto XXIV

[After many days, the memory of gopis flashes through Krishna's mind and his longing for their love becomes irresistible. He sends Uddhaba to Gopa to bring the news of the gopis, his parents and friends. Uddhaba reaches Gopa where he is welcomed to Nanda's palace. Raga: *Bani Kalasha: Banabasa Chautisha Brutta*]

Days crawled by.
Suddenly, one day, the thought of the gopis
Possessed Govinda's mind. His longing
For their love, like a dark night,
Spread its wings all around.
He felt like burning in the flames of lust.

He remembered
His happy days with the gopis
When he saw the sun going down
The Sumeru mountain. He took
His supper at Basudeva's house
And fell asleep on his ivory bed.

In his dream, he discovered himself
At Brindaban in the company
The boys of Gopa.
Next, he found himself
In Nanda's house, Yoshoda anointing
Him with saffron. Then he saw
Himself frolicking with the gopis
In the arbours in spring.
He also saw himself playing dice
With Radha, betting with each other.

Suddenly he woke up
And, shocked by her absence,
He decided, "I shall send Uddhaba
To Gopa tomorrow. He will bring me
The news of my parents and deliver
My message to the gopis. We are bound
To each other by bond of love.

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Since I failed to keep my word
They must be deeply disturbed.

They would not bear my absence
Even for a while. How are they now?
How anxiously they used to wait
For my return from the forest!
Now also they must be looking
In the direction of Mathura
With a wistful sigh."

It became morning when
Cocks crowed and cuckoos cooed.
The sound of the conch emanated from
The Shiva temples. Soon the place
Was filled with the noise
Of crows and doves.

Newly-wed women woke up.
Lechers hurried away from the houses
Of whores. Thieves retreated
To safe places. Swallows twittered.
Owls and frogs hid themselves
For fear of crows.

The sun shone in the east.
Lotuses bloomed while lilies shut
Themselves. Leaving his bed, Krishna
Washed his face and cleaned his teeth.
After bath, he got dressed. Then he asked
Satyaki to fetch Uddhaba.

When Uddhaba arrived
He instructed him, "Move to Gopa at once
As my emissary.
Meet my parents .
And tell them all about me,
Convey my good wishes
To gopis, Sudama, Sridama and others.
They are my body and I am their soul.

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There is no difference between us."

So saying, he wrote a letter to the gopis
And gave it to Uddhaba who
Set out for Gopa, riding
Kalaketu, his chariot. He thanked Krishna
To have let him visit the gopis, which
The *yakshas, gandharvas, rakshasas,*
Shiva and Brahma had failed to achieve.
He also thanked his parents,
But for whose blessings
It would not have been possible.

He drove the chariot as quickly
As he could, chanting Hari's name loudly
While tears flowed from his eyes.
Suddenly he caught sight of some
Cowherd boys playing in the street.

When he asked them
What place it was, they said,
"It is Gopa where Krishna used to live.
We are his playmates. Since his departure
With Akrura, we have become
As gloomy as stars
In the absence of the moon.
We are like trees
Whose roots are cut."

One of them burst into tears.
Beating his head, he said, "O God!
All our joys were but a dream.
Once, while playing, he defeated me
And, in anger, drowned me in Yamuna
And smeared sand on my body.

When I complained to his mother
She ran after him with a stick.
Seeing Krishna trying to escape,
I blocked his way, letting his mother

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Catch him.

Frightened, he folded his hands,
And pleaded not guilty,
Which his mother found satisfactory.
When I remember the incident
I break down with grief."

Uddhaba thought to himself,
"If this boy loves Krishna so much,
What to speak of the gopis?"
One of the boys asked,
"Where have you come from?
A person called Akrura came
And took away the Wealth of Gopa.
Tell us, what you have come for.
Whose son are you?
Pray, tell us."

With mild words,
Uddhaba replied, "I am Uddhaba,
Krishna's emissary. Now let's see
How your Gopapura looks like."
They led him to Nanda's palace
And informed the queen of his
Arrival. While Bhakata Das narrates it
His eyes are filled with joyful tears.

Canto XXV

[Uddhaba meets Yashoda and they have a long conversation which develops into a heated debate. Uddhaba considers Krishna *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, pervading the whole universe. To Yashoda, Krishna is her son whom she has brought up with the throes of a mother. A gopi while passing that way mistakes Uddhaba for Krishna and calls out her friends to come and see. Raga: *Kamodee*]

The boys told Yashoda, " Mother!
Rama and Krishna have sent a messenger
Who waits outside in his chariot,

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A letter hanging from his neck
Like a garland."

Delighted, Yashoda came out
To meet the emissary who,
From a distance, resembled Krishna.
Going nearer,
She found she was mistaken.
She thought God was not that kind
To send Govinda back to her.
She welcomed him
And offered him a gold-plated seat
And scented water to wash his feet.
As he took his seat she asked,
"What brings you here? You took away
Krishna, our only wealth,
By sending Akrura.
Can there be
A greater disaster than that?
Now, what more do you want?
Have you come to take our lives?

Better take it away
And relieve our sorrow forever.
Since Shyamasundara left for Mathura.
Our lives have lost their charm.
After Madhava's departure
I am groping in the dark
Like a blind man having lost his stick.

Like lotuses in a pond without water
And under the hot sun,
Or fish in hot water,
Or bees having lost their hive,
Or lilies without the moon,
Such am I without my son.

Who should I ask for solace?
Cruel God has conspired against me,
Envious of the treasure I had.

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Had He been here,
I must have avenged my loss."

So saying, she shed tears of pain
That soaked her clothes.
Seeing her weep bitterly,
Hari's emissary felt embarrassed.

With soothing words, Uddhaba said,
"O Madhava's mother!
Rest assured, Krishna will return.
He dwells in all beings
As *Om* exists in all mantras
And Vedantas.
He does not react to anything.

He pervades the water, the land
And the sky. There is not a place
Where He is not. So do not weep.
He is as much in me as in you.
We cry when He cries, and laugh
When He makes us laugh.
He destroys, protects and creates.
He is present in all beings,
From insects to *Brahman*."

Nanda's queen replied,
"O Uddhaba!
I only know Madhava as my son.
Only *yogis*, who practice meditation,
Will appreciate your wisdom.
But a young woman like me
Does not have the purity of their minds,
And, to me, he is only my son.
Well, yes, he is in me. I feel
My son dancing in me all the time."

Uddhaba said, " Mother!
Why do you say 'my son' again and again?
The wise worship at His feet

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For their salvation. He has no form:
No beginning, nor end.
Suka and Sanaka, who know *Brahman*,
See Him as the meeting point
Of form and no form.
Shiva, Brahma, Narada and Ananta
Know Him. Nevertheless,
They look for Him here and there
In vain. O young woman!
It is by the grace of Almighty
That you have been blessed with
God as your son."

Still not convinced, Yashoda said,
"Whatever you say,
Madhava is my son.
He whom you call formless,
Is beyond human comprehension.
How could you make Him
Your own when
He belongs to none ?
There is no way to catch
The wind. He expresses
Himself in human beings
Like the moon's reflection
On water.

Leave it, O Govinda's messenger !
You may call him *Brahman*
As many times as you wish,
But he is son to me.
The wise worship him
For the salvation of their souls.
But, why discuss all that in Gopa?
Why don't you tell this to those
Who know *Brahman*?
You will be greatly honoured.

Tell me, if you can,
About my cloud-complexioned son.
That will lessen my sorrow.

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Or else, go back. I am eager
To see and listen to him.
Will Merciful God unite us again?
If he returns, I shall wear him
Like an ornament around my neck.
Tell me, Uddhaba!
Will my Madhava really come back?"

Unable to control herself,
She fell down
Like a tree chopped off.
She was muttering, as if in delirium,
"O my Krishna!"

Seeing her so distressed,
Uddhaba said, "Mother! Weep not.
Mukunda will surely come back
To you." Those words of consolation
Made her happy.

Looking at Uddhaba, she asked,
"How do I believe you when Krishna
Did not keep his own words?
Aren't you lying to me as Krishna did?"

Uddhaba replied benignly,
"How can I be equal to Him?
He is Ananta.
At each hair-root of His body.
Clusters of universe exist.
He can change lies into truth
And vice versa.
Veda has failed to discover
His beginning ,middle or end.
He is incomprehensible.
He is the Supreme Soul,
Present everywhere,
In everything,
From insects to *Brahman*."

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Yashoda's face turned red in anger.
She said "What the hell
Are you talking about my son?
I have myself given birth to him ;
It becomes a lie,
And your '*Brahman*' is the truth !

To prove my point, if you so like,
I shall now go to Mathura
And come back, carrying
Madana Mohana in my lap.

If he is *Brahman*, how could I tie him
To *arjuna* and *jamala* trees?
You say he is everywhere.
But I know he is only in me.

Ah ! Leave it! I will believe in you
Only if you bring him back.
Now go back
And fetch me the Moon of Gopa."

Uddhaba replied, " Mother!
He is the Lord of the three worlds.
How can anyone bring Him
Against His will? He is the One
For whom Baladeva, Shiva and Brahma
Do errands."

The queen, infuriated, scolded him,
"All the people of Mathura speak alike.
Akrura took away my son,
Saying it was Kamsa's order.
Saphala's son has run a razor
Around my throat;
You are applying lime to it.
It is like adding
Fuel to fire."

She looked above in desperation,

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Chanting 'Kahnu.
Beating her breast,
She sat gloomily, her face cupped
In her hands.
Separation from her son
Made her cry like a *Kurari*.
As a fly in a pot of oil,
She was completely soaked with tears.
Collecting herself, she looked at Uddhaba
With questioning eyes.
Just then, a doe-eyed gopi,
On her way to fetch water,
Saw a chariot standing outside
Nanda's house. She thought,
"Has Govinda come here secretly?
Has he come to take his parents with him?"
Looking through the window,
She saw Yashoda talking with a stranger.

She mistook Uddhaba for Krishna,
His golden crown glittering
More than the sun. His nose, ears,
Lips, throat, hands, thighs, feet
And finger-nails resembled
Those of Krishna. The way he sat,
Spoke and laughed was the same
As Krishna's.

She dropped the pitcher
And ran along the street, screaming,
"O friends! Come out and see
Krishna talking with his mother."

Leaving their houses,
The women of Braja came out
And ran to Nanda's house in groups
Of five, seven, ten and twenty.

They were saying from a distance,
"O Madana Mohana!
See our suffering with your own eyes.

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Neither can we eat nor sit peacefully.
Our bodies have shrunken;
Our tears flow ceaselessly.

We are like fish in hot water
Or lilies without the moon.
As during drought the soil cracks,
So do our hearts without you.

We look as dim as a flame
Without ghee. Kama makes us
Suffer ; whom will we say this?
He will flee when he sees Krishna.

They entered Nanda's house
Which was soon
Crowded with women.
Bhagatacharan Das says:
I share the feelings of the gopis.

Canto XXVI

[Soon the gopis gather at Nanda's house, but are disappointed to find Uddhaba, instead of Krishna there. Uddhaba tells them that Krishna has sent the message that he will return soon. Raga: *Kalasha*]

When the gopis saw
The stranger was Uddhaba,
Not Madhava, the Lord of their lives,
They were lost in the sea of grief,
Like a *chakora* in the new-moon night.

One of them said, "Look, dear!
For all that we did for him,
This is the reward.
We mistook poison for nectar.
We do not know what to do;
There is emptiness everywhere.
A violent storm is beating against
A house, already ramshackled.

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Our bodies have become as shrivelled
As wood; Uddhaba has set fire to it.
Nanda's sons are the water
That can douse the fire,
Or else it will completely devour us".

To which a gopi with large hips
Added, "O dear! We are fated thus.
That is why the cloud
Sends us no rain, but only lightning
To destroy the trees of our hopes."

A passionate woman,
Fuming with anger.
Cautioned everyone,
"Do not add ghee,
Straw and myrrh to fire,
Nor talk about Kubuja's paramour."
Saying so, she sat down,
Her head downcast.
Staring blankly at the sky,
A gopi with eyes
Like that of a *khanjan* bird responded,
"God has been cruel to us.
He lured us by showing something,
Then took it away.Like a mirage,
It filled us with hopes,
But failed to quench our thirst.

To which a gopi with a flecked face
Reacted, "It is like an elephant
Eating a wood-apple.
When it excretes,
The fruit comes out unbroken,
But hollow within.
It is like offering an empty pitcher
To one who is thirsty".

A woman, delicately built,
Said, "Take the example
Of a banana tree which stands erect

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With a cool trunk. But when
It is time for fruition
It bends down."

Another woman, bedecked with
A garland of *ashoka* flowers,
Stated, "It is like the story of the trader
Who, while waiting for his vessel
To return, hears that
It has foundered on a reef."

Touched by their devotion,
Uddhaba knew why Krishna was so eager
To send him here. He said,
"O Beauties of Braja! Why do you
Blame Krishna for nothing?
His flag is called the Savior
Of the Fallen.
He belongs to every being,
Not to anyone in particular.
Now listen carefully why
Ananta has sent me here."

All of them sat down in groups,
In the courtyard,
Their eyes fixed on Uddhaba.
They were ready to hear
The message he had to deliver.

Those who occupied the front row
Were Bhadra, Sarani, Kumuda,
Manasaharini, Hira, Lila, Bimala,
Sarala, Sulakshyana, Kurangakshi,
Bisaghni and Asokamalini.

In the south were Medha, Sumedha,
Sarala, Sita, Parijata, Labanga, Latika,
Champa, Madhavi and Sronita.
The north was occupied by
Padma, Manjula, Kusala, Susila,

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Rangini, Bilambini, Ambika,
Marali and Kutastani.

In the rear sat four women
Such as Taraka, Bakula,
Jatimala and Satabari.

Krishna's emissary sat in the middle,
Ready to address the assembly.
Brinda implored, "Tell us about Govinda.
We do not want to hear
Anything else."

Uddhaba, his eyes tearful, began,
"O Beauties of Braja!
You will be happy to know that
Krishna is returning soon to Gopa.
He has sent this good news to you."

Bhadra asked, "But when
Will Sridhara come back?
How long will we keep ourselves alive?
Bhagatacharan says:
The gopis will surely die
If Krishna does not return.

Canto XXVII

[A great conflict ensues between Uddhaba and the gopis over their understanding of Krishna; the former representing *Jnana* and the latter *Bhakti*. To explain their love with Krishna, the gopis show him various spots in Brindaban where they have spent the happiest moments of their lives with Krishna. Uddhaba hands over Krishna's letter to Radha. Raga: *Biprasimha Chautisha Brutta*]

In reply to what Brinda had asked,
Uddhaba said,
"Shyama will soon return.
So do not worry.
He resides in every being.
O gopis!

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None can have claim over Him.
Only those who chant His name
Can see Him.

He has no form.
Like the moon's reflection
In a pot of water
He resides in every soul.
O gopis! Though formless, He assumes
Different forms, depending on
The shape of the pot.

Meditate on *Brahman*.
Let your earthly desires perish.
In the deepest core of your heart
Install Niranjana.
This body is not real;
It is short-lived.
Therefore, try to recognize Him.
O gopis! You can have Him
If you control the six *chakras*
And look within,
With your eyes shut.

You will see Him with four arms,
Seated on the stigma of a lotus
Of fifty petals, on a gem-studded throne,
Placed on a bejewelled platform.
Take refuge at His feet.
O gopis! Then only He will be yours.
All your sorrows will disappear."

Not at all convinced,
The gopis argued, "Your wise talks
Are of no use. A little curd
May turn a potful of milk sour,
When added to it.
O Hari's messenger!
Our devotion is a sea;
Your learned talk is a river.

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It is our misfortune
To be taught by you. It may benefit
Those who know *Brahman*,
But we have nothing to do with it.
O Hari's emissary! For us, it is like
An elephant eating a wood-apple.
Wisdom not tempered with love,
Is like a wood-apple eaten by
An elephant. When excreted,
It looks good from outside,
But empty inside. Wisdom without love
Is like that. You know nothing
Beyond wisdom; you count it
As valuable as diamond.
O Hari's emissary!
Wisdom stays only for a while;
It evaporates very quickly.
Wise men strive for
Four kinds of salvation,
None of them based on love.
They are less than slaves;
We do not like their ways.
O Hari's emissary!
Why should one, living on nectar,
Crave for *mahua* juice?

Hari's name is the best ornament;
One who always recites it,
Needs no other jewellery.
Should one prefer curry-leaf flowers
To jasmine? Your *Brahmajnana*
Is like that. O Hari's emissary!
Do not teach sermons to us.
Better, go back.

That which you call *Brahman*
Manifests itself in nature,
Which is as unfeeling as thunder.
But *Bhakti* is like the earth,
Rich with human passions.

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O Hari's emissary!
Bhahmajnana is inferior to *Bhakti*.

Now do as I say.
Live the life of a devotee;
Worship Him in various ways.
Give up pride, reticence, caste,
And your desire for sex and wealth.
O Hari's emissary!
Then only you can attain His love.
Do not run after the knowledge
Of *Brahman* in vain.

Love is defiled
When wisdom is added to it.
As a faithful wife loses her honour
By making love to another person,
O Hari's emissary, so does *Bhakti*
Lose its purity when it
Embraces *Jnana*.

We tell you this as you are
A sacred soul. Had he been
Someone else, we would not have
Revealed to him the secrets of the soul.
O Hari's emissary!
Learned men are ignorant of it;
Their hearts are like dead trees.

You are one of them.
We knew it when you started speaking
On *Brahman*. All we know is that
All *'Brahmans'* originate from Krishna.
O Hari's emissary!
We do not bother about your *Brahman*.

Our only *Brahman* is he
Who swallowed the forest fire
And protected the people of Gopa
From Indra's wrath

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By raising Govardhan.
We worship him with love.
O Hari's emissary!
We do not wish to enter
Into an intellectual discussion.

If *Brahman* is in every being,
Why look for Him elsewhere?
If He is in you as *Parama* bird,
Who has sent you here, then?
O Hari's emissary! Who ordered you
To come to Gopa and whose message
You carry to us?"

When Uddhaba said Krishna had sent him
The gopis burst into laughter.
They said, "That shows
Our *Brahman* is the Lord of all.
O Hari's emissary! Your *Brahman*
Does errands for Krishna."

Surprised by their arguments,
Uddhaba thought, "How could they know
All this? They must be a part
Of Govinda. There is no God
Above Him; not even Brahma, Ananta
And Shiva are His equals.

Whereas *brahmacharis* and *yogis*
Are often misled by their knowledge
Of *Brahman*, the gopis could have Him.
Praise be to the gopis!
None can be their match."

Hari's emissary, expressing
His indignation, said,
"I have come here as a messenger.
But I am sorry to find each one
Of you arguing with me.
Do you think it honourable?"

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One of them replied, "It is you
Who started it by saying
That a lion and an elephant,
And a sea and a river
Are one and the same.
How can they be equals?
Please do not misunderstand us.

Now listen to what Govinda did
While he was here.
It is unbelievable.
We would like to tell you
Whatever little we know."

Saying so,
She burst into tears. Her voice
Choked, she narrated her story
While her love for Krishna
Swelled like a river, from within.
Chanting "O Krishna!"
She fell to the ground like a creeper,
Until her friend took her
Onto her lap.

Bhadra came forward, saying,
"O Govinda's emissary!
How should I describe him!
When I think of him, I feel like
Burning inside, like a house on fire.
Such has been our plight
Since he left us.

Once, here in Brindaban,
Breaking the silence of the night,
He played his flute so amorously
That it burnt us
With the passion of love.
Forgetting the dignity of our family,
We left our houses
And ran to the forest.

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His beauty captivated us.
He played a trick;
Without anyone's knowledge he vanished
Into the forest with Brindabati.

The night was dark,
And we were scared.
We called him loudly;
Soon he appeared.
He held us in deep embrace.
His divine dalliance charmed
All of us."

When Bhadra stopped
Lopamudra began, "O Uddhaba!
I remember him sitting under this tree,
Looking more handsome than Kama.
What he did to me that day
Is still etched in my mind.

Another day,
While playing in water, he did
Such mischief which cannot be told.
The memory of each day
Haunts us. O Hari's emissary!
Who will we blame
When our luck does not favour us?"

Saying so,
The moon-faced one stood silently,
Her face downcast.
Next came Hemalata. She said,
"You are right, dear! Let me add
An example to strengthen your point.
O beautiful one! Listen to me carefully,
Others may also share it.

Everyone in the world knows
What Shiva, Vishnu, Kubera,
Indra, Vyasa, Binayak and Sachi did.

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Krishna is no different.
They have betrayed all those
Who loved them. One who trusts them
Is deceived. But they get away
Easily as they are great figures."
Another woman, delicately-built,
Was burning with anger.
She pushed through the crowd
And sat down before the emissary.

She said to him, "O Hari's emissary!
Listen to what Krishna has done.
Promising to return in four days
He did not come,
Enchanted by Kubuja's love.
I do not know what is so special
About her that he forgot Gopa forever."

Surangini got up to say,
"Man clings to the things he loves.
Look at the honey-bee, who kisses
The lotus as well as the curry-leaf flowers.
Such is Krishna, who, leaving us behind,
Fell in love with Kubuja.
By Krishna's grace, she got her
Beauty and youth. How can she
Let go of him? She will keep him away
From Gopa forever.

How crafty the women of Mathura are!
They seduced him
By charms and roots and herbs.
Where did they learn all this?
They take pleasure in coveting
Others' wealth, while
Its rightful owners pine for
Its retrieval."

Looking downwards
And raising her hands,

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She continued, "O Uddhaba!
Krishna got away with the injustice
He did to us as he was a king's son.
We have seen him killing Putana
And Sandha, but was pardoned.

Lack of action against him
Gave him the courage
To break his promise.
O great soul!
Tell this to him
On your return to Mathura."

Next, the cuckoo-voiced Kantimala
Rose to speak,"O great soul!
Listen, what else he did.
Tell all this to Kubuja's lover."

Meanwhile, a strange thing happened.
A bumble-bee, attracted by the smell
Of the gopis, and mistaking them
For flowers, fell at Brinda's feet,
Droning.

Considering her feet to be lotuses
And her fingers to be *champak* buds,
It perched on the nail
Of her big toe. When she tried
To kick it away, it kissed her feet,
Sweet-scented."

Suspecting it to be Krishna's spy
The moon-faced Brinda scolded it
Saying, "Go to your Krishna.
Why come here? There will be none
More faithless than you are.
I warn you not to touch my feet.

All those who are dark-complexioned
Cuckoos, snakes, Govinda and yourself

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Are not worthy of trust.
All of you begin with love
And end with betrayal.
Listen, O bee! It is your habit
To love a flower, suck its honey
To your satisfaction and, then,
Fly to another flower,
Cutting the former
At its stalk.
When Krishna does the same,
To whom will we complain?
O how cursed we are!

One who brings up a cobra,
Feeding it with milk, is bitten,
One day, by it to death,
O bee! So are we deceived by Krishna
Who we loved so much.

We had nourished him
Since his childhood and loved him
With all our heart. In return,
He threw us into the mouth of a snake
Called Kama. Will he ever return,
O bee? He is the only physician
Who can take out the poison
From our bodies.

Now listen to the story
Of the cuckoo, who, leaving its parents,
Takes shelter in the crow's nest.
As it grows up, it flies back
To its parents, to the cuckoo's
Utter disappointment.
So did Krishna behave with us.

The lotus blooms when the sun shines,
It pours out its heart for the sun.
But the sun dries up the pond
So that it burns the lotus

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And its love to ashes.

What the sun does to the lotus,
In return for its love and devotion,
Krishna did the same to us.
He ruined all our hopes.
The pond of our love dries up,
Our body like clay cracks,
Still he could not become ours.
O bee! All of you are the same.
Now, leave my feet
And get lost.

Why don't you go to your friend
At Mathura and kiss the flowers
On his bun? Carry his message
To the women there. O bee!
Do not step into Gopa again.

Look at its mouth, O friends!
It is laden with pollen grains.
It must have kissed the flower,
Falling off from Krishna's garland
While hugging the women of Mathura.

It sports its mouth
Only to chide us. Staying here.
For four days, it will return to Krishna.
O friends! It has come to burn us.
Therefore, it kisses my feet so warmly.

Listen, O bee!
We will never forget
How he deceived us, As the lamp
Cannot be away from the darkness
Under it or the body from its shadow,
Such is our relationship with Krishna.
Can milk and water
Be separated from each other?
Now he is not with us,

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He found Kubuja's love as the cure
For his fever of love, considering
Gopis of no use. O bee!
Go and tell your Krishna all this.

Still, we urge upon you:
Do not trust anything
That is dark in colour.
See, how the lotus-eyed one
Betrayed us. O bee!
Do not believe in Krishna.

The dark-complexioned Nanda's son
Outraged our modesty
And made us objects of ridicule.
As one decorates his bun with flowers
And throws them away the next day
When they wither,
So did Krishna abandon us,
O bee! We became like the cuckoos
Of autumn. We forgot
The prestige of our clan.

The hare lost its life.
Relying on the moon. We will die
Reposing faith in Krishna.
He will bear the sin of killing women
For ages to come. O bee!
Convey this to Krishna.

Why did he love us so deeply
If he was to forsake us?
Why did he embrace us
So lovingly ? Why did he kiss
Our cheeks ?
Why did he seek our company
Day and night? O bee!
What an irony! He smashed us
As if we were glass.
From the day he devoured

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The forest fire, we knew
He was not a man, but God in disguise,
Living secretly in Gopa. O bee!
Can a man dance on a serpent's crest?
Can he change poison to nectar?

As we sowed, so we reaped.
No use saying it now.
Those who think themselves
Greater than what they are,
Perish. For being closer to him,
O bee! We were too proud of our youth.
Why shouldn't we perish?
Never had we heeded the advice
Of our elders and husbands.
We failed to consider what is good
And what is evil.
We never left his company.
We lost our chastity for him.
O bee! Now, you can see
What joy we are having!

Had we known that
We would be deceived,
We would not have gone so far.
We are victims of fraud and guile.
We mistook him for a nectar tree,
But later found its fruits poisonous.
O bee! Who would we blame
Except our own luck?

Swayed by the generous words
Of his miserly master,
A greedy man who wishes for his grace
Is deceived and bound to suffer.
Such are we who pinned
Our hopes on Madhava. O bee!
We still wait for his return.
We do not know when
Our misery will come to an end.

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O bee! You will shut your ears
If you hear how he disappointed us.
Wood or stone wears out in time,
But the shameless gopis
Are still alive. O bee!
You can see for yourself
How miserable we are.

Since the Moon of Gopa left us
We have not cared for
Our food and dress.
We only wept and wept.
Pining for him our bodies shrank,
Like the lotus deprived of sunlight.
O bee, we are like the eggs
Of a tortoise, left forlon
On the shore. We are yet to know
What we are punished for.

See, how we have preserved
His nail-marks on our breasts.
The more we see it,
The more we think of him.
Because of this we could not
Forget him, O bee,
It was a mistake.
It makes us angry and anguished."

Saying so, she kicked the bee
That fell at a distance.
It flew into the sky, droning,
Pointing at it, she told others,
"Mark it! It flies in that direction."

Witnessing all that was going on,
Uddhaba kept his eyes closed.
Such love as of the gopis was rare
In the world. Greatly impressed,
He stood up and fell at Brinda's feet.
Embarrassed,

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She raised him from the ground,
And, with folded hands, said,
"O Uddhaba! Have you lost you mind?
You are one of Krishna's great devotees
And proficient in scriptures.
O great soul! It is not proper
For you to bow down to young women
Like us."

To which Uddhaba replied,
"O Govinda's lovers!
You deserve respect as I find you
Greater devotees than I am.
What to speak of myself,
Even Ananta, Brahma and Shiva
Do not have the kind of devotion
You have. O gopis! You have
Experienced His love physically.
How can I be equal to you?"

His body quivered
With tremors of love,
He fell at their feet, chanting "Hari."
Raising his hands.
He got up and began to dance.
He wept, his eyes fixed on the gopis.
He was convinced
That *Bhakti* was superior to *Jnana*.

The gopies led him by hand
To the arbour. They said,
"It is here that Krishna would block
The road, asking for toll.
O Hari's emissary!
The story of his benevolence
Cannot be told in words.

Under this *kadamba* tree,
On the banks of this Yamuna,
In this bower in spring,

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He enchanted us by displaying
Many wonders. Alas !
Now that has become a dream."
While speaking, her body trembled
Her eyes went into the sockets.
She fell down and turned
Over and over on the banks.

One of her friends raised her up.
Pointing at Kalindi lake, she said,
"It is here our Lord of life smashed
Kaliya's head and plucked lotus.
It is here he swallowed fire
To save the cattle from imminent death.

He did a great service
To the people of Gopa
When wrathful Indra caused rain
For seven days and seven nights,
With thunder and lightnings.
He raised the Govardhan hill
Over Gopa and protected us
From Indra's anger.

See, Uddhaba! It is here that
He used to sit and play his flute,
Which thrilled us, forcing us
Out of our houses to meet him.
Its memory strikes me like an arrow."

After showing the places
That Krishna frequented, they silently
Settled down. Finding it
The right moment, Uddhaba handed over
Madhava's letter to Brinda, saying that
Krishna had sent it to her.

She touched it to her bosom
Before she opened the seal.
She kissed it in great delight

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And opened it, thinking on Hari.

Before she could go through it
Her friends demanded that
It be read out to them,
And Brinda agreed.

Bhakta Das says:
I pay my greatest respect to Brinda.

Canto XXVIII

[Radha reads out Krishna's letter which is as passionate as it is mournful. He has assured the gopis of his quick return. Raga: *Koushik*]

(Krishna's letter)

Krishna writes to Radha:
"O goddess of my life! My beloved!
Be assured, I shall meet you soon.
Do not worry, O my love!
I have been an easy target for Kama
Since I left you.

Finding me unable to join you,
Kama's weapon cuts me into pieces.
O my treasure!
He tortures me very often.
Only if fortune smiles on me,
I shall be able to see your face,
Which is the autumn moon.

O lotus-eyed, gold-complexioned one,
With a gait as stately as an elephant's!
O sweet-speaking, well-dressed,
Passionate one! Forget me not.
I implore you not to be sad.
I am hungry for the food of your love.

O fish-eyed one!
Know that Kama, like Ketu,

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Has encircled me. You are
A sea of beauty and I the traveller.
It is only when
You are cross with me, I become
An easy prey to Kama's torture.

The joy of those good, old days
Has faded away.
As days pass by,
My health deteriorates.
The sun seems to disappear
From the sky and days become dark.
O my love! Without you
Nectar tastes like poison.

Soft as a *sirisa* flower,
You are the boat
In the river of my love.
Your thighs are like inverted
Plantain trees; your gait is slow;
Your complexion fair and your eyes
Move quicker than those of
The *khanjan* bird. O my love!
Do not be as hard-hearted as thunder.
Have mercy on me. I cannot
Think of my existence without you.

How comfortable I felt
In your arms !
Now those sweet days are gone;
I am in Kama's grip.
I do not know what to do.
There is none to sympathise with me.
Surely, I shall be destroyed
By the fire of love.

O Padmini!
Your belly is like a lotus leaf,
Cheeks like mirrors of gold,
Voice sweeter than the cuckoo's

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And lips redder than *jaba*.
O my love!
What a wonderful creation
Of Biswakarma you are !
You are incomparable !

Your nose is like a sesame flower
And ears like Kama's noose.
The vermilion on your forehead
Looks more radiant than many suns.
O my treasure!
Your eyebrows are like Kama's bow,
Collyrium lines its string
And eyes its arrows.

Your wink is the archer's ring.
As a *kumbhakara* wasp kills
An insect and brings it
To sense later, so does your
Sidelong glances to me.
O my love!
Because of your forgiving nature
You overlooked all my mistakes.

Curls of hair on your forehead
Look like a swarm of bumble-bees,
Busy kissing your lotus-face.
When I see it, I feel in me
A surge of excitement. O dear!
Kama, seeing you, throws away
His quiver and quits the place,
Embarrassed.

The beautiful bun on your head
Appears to be a new-formed cloud.
Your complexion of *kurubaka* flowers
Sparks like lightning and fills
The hearts of the onlookers with joy.
O my treasure!
Your beauty can distract

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A *yogi'is* mind.
O how nicely you comb
And braid your hair!

Sometimes you deck your bun
With jasmine flowers, where
Greedy bees crowd for honey.
Had I been there with you
What a pleasure I would have derived!
Rambha will be put to shame,
Being beaten by your beauty.
While making love
Tresses of your hair tumble down over
Your back, looking like the Kaliya cobra.
The flowers you wear
Drop from your body
And scatter over the rock-bed,
Looking like stars.

Simmering with the heat of love,
You soak in sweat, your breasts
Visible through your wet clothes
Running around your lion-waist.
Such a sight will put Kama to shame.
O how really I miss it!

Your thighs are like
Inverted plantain trees. Your anklets
Jingle as you walk with light steps.
You gratify my desire
For love with sweet words.

When one day,
After sex in reverse position,
I begged for a kiss,
You wrinkled your nose and said,
'I do not know what it is.'
These memories pain me.
Surely Madana will kill me.
When you appear in gayful raiment

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With a smile, as fair as *kashatandi* flowers,
O *khanjan*-eyed, you look like
A picture. You pretend not to have
Seen me. Your head downcast,
You are too shy to speak.

You draw lines on the ground
With the tip of your big toe.
When I ask you to sit in my lap,
You smile and say, "Why so?"
Then you leave me
And sit a few hands away
With sham anger in your eyes.

Struck by Kama's dart,
I suddenly rise and hold you
In deep embrace, trying to coax you
With sweet words. You push me
Aside, saying, 'I do not like all this.'

When I beg you for a kiss,
You, in all innocence,
Bury your face in your clothes.
When I hug you forcibly, you resist.
O my treasure!
You are as soft as a *sirisa* flower.
As you are not with me
Kama, the cruel, lays me
On a bed of arrows.

He strikes me hard;
Only you can be my rescuer.
O my love!
You are the boat to ferry me across
The river of the desire for love.
Your laughter is like the *kunda* flowers.
You hair is as thick
And as sable as a cloud.

O goddess of my life!

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I remember the day
You sat by the window,
Watching outside. Pretending
Not to have seen you,
I made some remarks to which you
Responded by the movement
Of your eyes. Kama is the only
Witness. It is still etched
In my mind.

You are an epitome of all virtues.
O lotus-eyed one!
What more shall I write?
Tell all your friends not to worry.
I shall meet all of you
In a few days.

O Tilottama, O Chitraleka, Ambika,
Sobha, Baula, Hiraradana, Sumana,
Sunagatri, Sarala, Sita, Bimala,
Bira, Hemahara, Satabari, Lila,
Champa, Latika, Sriya, Chanchala,
Bisaghnika, Shanti, Kanti, Mala,
Suraganika, Srimati, Sharadayee,
Madhavi, Kashi, Mohini, Yamuna
Kalindi, Padmini, Narmada, Pramada,
Kanjanayani, Brinda, Hemarama, Shyama,
Manjula, Kaberi, Hira, Chitrarekha!"

This way, mentioning the names
Of sixteen thousand gopis,
He had written the letter that Radha
Read out to one and all.

They listened to it fully
And felt greatly relieved.
Then they stood up and went back
To their houses, quite pleased.
Uddhaba went to Nanda's palace
Where he finished

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His bath and breakfast.
Then he retired to bed
Thinking on Nanda's son.
Bhaktacharan says:
I pressed his feet with joy,
Thinking that serving a *Sadhu*
Is a matter of luck.

Canto XXIX

[Deciding to reply, the gopis write a letter about their sorrowful plight and give it to Uddhaba. They instructed him to deliver it to Krishna when the women of Mathura would not be there with him. Uddhaba leaves Gopa with the letter. Raga: *Kalyan Ahari*]

Uddhaba spent his days
In Nanda's house merrily.
When he left,
The king of Gopa bade him farewell,
With ornaments as presents.
He also sent a verbal message
To Govinda, which seemed endless.

Seeing Uddhaba preparing
To leave, the women of Braja
Thought of writing a letter
To Krishna, about their predicament.
They thought it will have
On him a great effect.

They told this to the *chakora*-eyed,
The moon-faced, the gold-complexioned,
The full-breasted, the pomegranate-toothed,
The curly-haired, the swan-gaited,
The *veena*-voiced Brusabhanu's daughter.

Radha consented. She asked
For a *lekhana* and a palm-leaf
Which Surangini, her friend,
Immediately supplied.

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SriRadha began by paying respect
To Gopinath. Then she addressed him
As Idol of Gopa, Darling of Braja,
New Cloud, Yashoda's son
And Life of the Universe.

"O Lord of the Fallen!
You left us in utter neglect.
O the swan-eyed, flute-bearing,
Redeemer of sorrow,
Sea of compassion!
O Madana Mohana, the killer of Putana,
Sandha, Shakata, Truna, Baka,
Jamala and arjuna!

You know how terrible the demons were.
You saved us from their atrocity,
O Moon of Brindaban !
What will we do
If they come back again?
Who will protect the unfortunate
Gopis ? Surely we will die.

You only can feel
How we have been living
Since you left.
O Nanda's Kanhai!
Will you really come back?
Come, we will read out
Our book of sorrow to you.

Food seems to us like poison;
Clothes like a snake.
Our bodies have lost their glaze,
They are too weak
To bear the weight of our ornaments.
O Krishna!
We have stopped going to Yamuna.
Whenever we go,
We never look at the *kadamba* tree.

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We avoid watching the moon.
No longer do we use
Sandalwood and comphor.
Tears keep flowing from our eyes
Incessantly. O Mohana, that is why
We cannot use collyrium.
Neither do we adorn our forehead
With vermilion, nor paint our cheeks
With pictures of crocodile.

No more do we wear a bun,
Nor have a good wash.
Of what use are our red lips
And sweet words, if you are
Not with us? O Lord! For us,
Days and nights are the same.
Our houses bear the look of a forest
While cold water feels like fire.

Like the *chakora*
On the night after the new-moon day,
We feel dead in your absence.
O Lord! We are victims of misfortune.
That we still continue to live
Being so much humiliated
Tells how shameless we must be.

We could spend a few days
With you because of our past virtues.
Those virtues once paid,
We lost you. O Lord!
There would not be anyone
As unhappy as we are.
Who can be so shameless as to live
After so much torture?

To whom will we express our sorrow?
Who will listen? You are the only one
To understand the poor gopis.
O Lord! Please do us a favour.

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Come to us,
Leaving the women of Mathura
For one night only,
And go back after you visit us.

You are the sea of compassion;
We, like minnows, were immersed
In it. Saphala's son, like Agasti,
Drank up the waters. O Lord!
Consider, how we will survive.
You forgot what you had promised.
O, why don't you
Take our words seriously?

To our good luck,
A rain-cloud had appeared in the sky
With a lot of hope.
But Kamsa's emissary
Came as a great storm
And, in the direction of Mathura,
Drifted it away. O Lord!
We are driven to despair.
Will the cloud come back again?
Will it shower compassion
In the form of rain?

See, how Kumbha's son
Tricked the Vindhya mountain,
Which promised not to grow
Till he returned. Then Agasti went
To the south and never came back.
O Lord! Our case is the same.
You are Agasti
And we, the mountain.

Though you are as guilty as he was,
Who will dare accuse you
Of your mistakes? O Lord!
Have pity on us!
You have to justify your name,

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The Friend of the Poor.

Mere milkmaids we are;
We have no knowledge
Of good and bad.
But you are a man of wisdom
And you let us down.
O Lord!
We are fated thus. Known as
The enemy of demons, you kill us
As a demon does.

The women of Madhupura serve
As the diet for your fever of love.
We, the young women of Braja,
Became unwanted.
O Lord!
Kubuja could become your healer.
Who should we tell this?
Cruel God took away
The treasure we had.

You know how often you saved
Us from dangers. Remembering that,
Come back and fulfill our desires.
O Lord! Wherever you may be,
You are ours. Should we die
From thirst when we have
The sea of compassion with us?

Do not you know
It is a sin to kill someone
One has fostered?
O Lord!
We are ignorant folks, having
No knowledge of right and wrong.

When you were here
We censured Kama every day.
After your departure.

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We are bound to appease him,
Or else he would punish us
To settle the old score.

No woman can check her temptation
When she sees your moonlike face
And hears your sweet words.
O Lord! Her desire to have you
Will increase one crore times.
Kama will never spare her.

If you really wish to come,
Hurry up. Or else do as I say.
Send a mixture of camphor,
Coconut water and lemon
By a messenger. O Lord!
We will drink it and die,
And you will be relieved forever.

Again, we think,
As we have tasted nectar from your
Sweet lips, the poison may not work.
Instead, it will give us much pain.
O Nanda's son!
It will be like fire upon fire;
It will burn us twice as fast.

You will hear everything
From Uddhaba. Save us from misery
And try to make us happy.
O Lord! We are floating in the sea
Of sorrow, struggling to survive
By holding onto the boat
Of your name.

Do something to remove our agony.
It will be possible
If you visit us once.
O Lord! Seeing you here,
Kama dare not trouble us.

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Better stay where you are
And spend you days and nights
With Kubuja there.
O Lord! It will make you happier
And you need not think
About the gopis any longer.
It is said the words of wise men
Are lines engraved on a stone.
But to our dismay,
They turned to be lines on water.
O Lord! Had we known it earlier
We would not have allowed you to go.
Known as the Pleasure-giver,
You deceived us.

Better call yourself
Friend of the Happy ones.
One who calls you Friend of the Poor
Will have the same fate as ours.
O Lord! You are like a goldsmith
Who lures buyers with honeyed words.

As he seduces a buyer
With lofty words to extract
All his savings, O Lord,
So do you. He cheats the buyers
While you cheat the gopis,
Which is unthinkable.

It is said the most pious
Commit sins sometimes,
And the most benevolent
Show miserliness. What is the use
Of their piety and benevolence
If they fail to keep their word?

Come soon,
Or we will give up our lives.
You will be blamed for killing women.
O Lord! Please think of us.

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For our sake, do not delay anymore.

Don't you have six seasons there?
Are there no bards of love, the moon,
Cuckoos, peacocks, mango trees,
Thundering clouds and water-hens?
O Lord! Doesn't Kama visit your place
With his bow of flowers ?

Yet, they are of no use
When you have the women of Mathura
With you. O Lord!
Kubuja has trapped you
In the nets of her love."

After finishng the letter
Radha drew pictures of a snake,
Hanuman and Shiva on it
And put it inside a bunch of flowers.

The full-breasted Radha
Gave it to Uddhaba to deliver it
To Krishna, when the women of Mathura
Would not be with him.
Bairagi Bhagatacharan says:
There will be a lot of commotion
If they come to know of it.

Canto XXX

[Uddhaba returns to Mathura and hands over Radha's letter to Krishna He tells him how Gopa looks desolate and how life has become a nightmare for the gopis. He expresses his wish to go back to Brindaban where he would spend the rest of his life with the gopis, sharing their joys and sorrows. Raga: *Pancham Baradi*]

With the letter from the gopis
Uddhaba took his farewell
And reached Mathura. He met
Krishna and bowed at his feet.

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Seeing him, the Idol of Braja was happy.
He embraced him, offered him a seat
And was eager to know what news
Of Gopa he had brought with him.

"O dear devotee!" he told Uddhaba,
"Tell me how the gopis are doing.
They are my dear ones,
Now victims of misfortune.
How are they? How is Brindaban
And all the animals in it?

How are my parents and friends?"
Shaking with tremors of love,
Uddhaba, with folded hands,
Began telling him the news of Gopa.
Overpowered by emotion,
He shut his eyes often
While he spoke.

"Listen, O Krupasindhu!
From what I saw and heard
I cannot but bow to the women of Braja.
I think, in matters of love and devotion,
None in the three worlds
Can be their equals, be they *brahmacharis,*
Chaste women, saints or gods.

I am grateful to you
To have sent me to Braja. It was
My great fortune to see the gopis.
Now, I pray to you to allow me
To go back to Brindaban. O Lord!
I wish to live with them.
For what happiness
Shall I stay here?

I shall do as they do
And follow them wherever they go.
I shall weep with them, dress like

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Them and meditate on you,
Chanting your name. O Lord!
I wish to remain always
By their side.

While speaking
His eyes flooded with tears.
Seeing it, Nanda's son said,
"Tell me, in short, what they said.
That will lessen my sorrow.
O Jewel of Jadavas!
There can be none as unhappy
As they are."

To which Uddhaba replied,
"It grieves me to say ill fares the land.
Brindaban has lost its lustre.
The trees wither and the cows
Give milk no more.
O Friend of the poor!
Crops have failed as the clouds
Do not bring rain any longer.

The wells have run dry;
The trees are barren, and the wind
Is aromatic no more.
Your absence hurts everyone,
O Friend of the Poor!
The gopis pine for you day and night.
They are passing through
The worst period of their lives.

No longer do they adorn themselves
With ornaments and flowers.
No more are they fond of dainty dishes
And attractive raiment.
Heaving sighs, they chant your name.
While doing it, they collapse
Many times. It seemed they lost
The sense of hearing.

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Like hills without trees
Or creepers after the spring is over
Or fish without water
Or lotus without the sun
Or women without husbands,
Such were the gopis.
Who can describe their sorrow,
In brief?

The five categories of people
Such as bracelet sellers, betel vendors,
Bangle sellers, traders and goldsmiths
Have stopped visiting Gopa
As they are no more wanted.
O Friend of the Poor!
The gardeners have also left the place
As flowers do not sell.

No more do the gopis visit Brindaban.
Unable to bear the heat of love,
They choose leaf-beds to sleep on.
Seeing that, the geese, the deer, the moon,
Kama, the cuckoos and the peacocks
Have fallen silent. This tells
How lonely the gopis were.

Flowers such as *champak*, jasmine,
Kurubaka, niali, white tulip
And *ashoka* bloom only to wither
And rot as gopis need them no more.
O Friend of the Poor!
This is the painful picture of Gopa.

It is strange to see,
While everything looked bleak and barren,
Yamuna was in spate.
The tears of the gopis have flowed into it,
Causing high flood.
O Friend of the Poor!
Do not ask about Brindaban.
It breaks my heart."

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Hearing Uddhaba's words,
Govinda shut his lotus-eyes.
The memory of gopis occupied
His mind. He said to himself,
"How dearly they love me!
Will God, the merciful,
Unite us again?"

Asking Uddhaba to leave,
Krishna returned to his chamber pensively.
Those who worship him
With all their heart, their sins
Shall surely be redeemed.
Leave aside all other gods.
Meditate only on Hari.

This body is mortal;
It does not last forever.
Wealth, relatives and parents are like
Lightning ; none of them
Will ever accompany the dead.
O Noble Ones!
Therefore, worship at Govinda's feet;
It will keep you away
From Yama's cruelty.

Have compassion on all living beings.
Chant Harekrishna day and night.
Give up lust, anger, greed, attachment,
Pride and intolerance,
The six enemies who stand in your way.
O Noble Ones!
You can resist them by chanting
Basudeva's name.

You have seen
That those who die, do not carry
Anything to their heavenly abode.
You invite troubles without cause.
You have eyes, but you behave as if

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You are blind. Follow your guru's
Instructions. O Noble Ones!
Take refuge at Hari's feet
To escape Yama's anger.

Yama, King of Beasts,
Never shows any mercy.
It is said in *Puranas* that
He conveys those to hell
Who do not chant Hari's name.
O Noble Ones! Keeping this in mind
Give up self-pride
And meditate on Radhagovinda.

Bhaktacharan Das regrets
For not having the company of *Sadhus*.
Drowned in the sea of the world.
He dies, beaten by the waves of desires.
O *Sadhus*!
Bless me.

❑❑

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GLOSSARY

Canto I

Rama	Balarama; also Baladeva, Balabhadra and Hali. He was Rohini's son and Krishna's step brother. He was named Shankarsana at birth. Identified as the eighth incarnation of Vishnu along with Krishna, he is worshipped as the God of Farming. He carries a plough and a mace as his weapons.
nandaka	The name of Vishnu's sword.
Lakshmi's Consort	Vishnu
Garuda	A huge mythological bird born to sage Kashyap and Binita. To free his mother from her slavery to Kadru, his cruel step mother, he had to bring nectar from heaven. He was a great Vaishnava and the carrier of Vishnu. The King of birds, he had large wings and a big nose.
Baka	A demon who went to Gopa to devour Krishna, assuming the shape of an egret. Krishna tore his mouth open and killed him. He was one of the brothers of Putana.
Naraka	The demon king of Jyotishapura who had defeated Indra. On Indra's request, Vishnu killed Naraka and brought back Indra's sceptre and Aditi's ear-rings. He also freed more than sixteen thousand gods, gandharvas, women and apsaras from captivity.
Mura	*Nrusingha Purana* (Odia) mentions that Mura was an apsara's son whom Vishnu had killed. In *Bamana Purana* he is described as a demon, killed by Vishnu.
Karana	The Milky Sea ; the Deluge
Nrusingha	The fourth incarnation of Vishnu who killed Hiranya, the demon king to save his son,

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Prahalad (also Prahlad) who was one of his great devotees. In answer to Prahalad's prayer, he appeared from a pillar, with the body of man and the head of lion. Making Hiranya lie on his knees, he tore his navel apart with his finger-nails.

Hiranya	Hiranya and Hiranaksha were sons of Kashyap and Diti. Vishnu killed Hiranya as Nrusingha and Hiranaksha in the sea as a boar.
Jadava	A descendant of Jadu dynasty.
Braja	The kingdom of Gopa.
Biswakarma	The chief architect of heaven
Essentially formless	God imagined as representing three qualities : Satwa, Raja and Tama. He has no form.
fourteen worlds	The universe imagined as composed of fourteen layers, seven below the earth (atala, bitala, sutala, rasatala, talatala, mahatala and patala) and seven above it (bhuh, bhubah, swah, mahah, janah, tapah and satya)
Bhabagrahi	One who can read the minds of others.
meditation ...... recollection :	Refers to Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga; Jnana stresses on recollecting, reading and listening whereas Bhakti includes mass chanting, singing prayer songs, worshipping, offering, serving, making friends and submitting to God.
Kaliyuga	One of the four Ages in Hindu mythology.
lila	God's cosmic playfulness
Rhyme :	Verse
Keshi	A follower of Kamsa whom Krishna had killed in the Bhandira forest.
Suka	A great sage ; son of Vyasa and grandson of Parasara
Bhagavata	One of the eighteen Puranas written in Sanskrit by Vyasa ; Odia version by Atibadi Jagannath Das (1492?-1552?)

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Parikshita	Son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjuna, one of the Pandavas. Accused of putting a dead snake around the neck of a rishi who did not respond to him, he was cursed by the rishi's son to die from snake-bite in a week's time. To make him die peacefully Suka read out *Bhagavata* to him on the banks of Ganga.
Drumila	A vidyadhara in his past life, he was expelled from heaven by Indra for his misconduct. He was born as a demon and became the king of Souva, on river Gomati. One day, while Indumati, Ugrasena's queen, was returning from her bath in Gomati after her menstrual cycle, Drumila, disguised as Ugrasena, had sex with her. She gave birth to a son who was named Kamsa.
Basudeva	The eldest son of Debamidha and Marisa, he had twelve queens namely, Pourabi, Rohini, Madira, Dhara, Baisakshi, Bhadra, Sunamni, Sahadevi, Santideva, Sudeva, Debarakshita and Devaki. He was the father of Krishna and Balarama and the brother of Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas.
snake-bed	Vishnu rests in the Milky Sea on a coiled cobra named Ananta.
Devaki	Devaka's daughter, Basudeva's wife and Krishna's mother.
Nanda	King of Gopa,foster father of Krishna and Balarama
Putana	Sister to Agha and Baka. She went to Gopa smearing poison on her breasts to kill Krishna. While breast-feeding Krishna sucked her milk, and, with it, sucked her life.
Agha	Putana's brother and a follower of Kamsa.
Kubera's sons	Kubera, the custodian of wealth in heaven, had two sons : Nalakubera and Manigriba. For not showing respect to Narada who was passing by them they were cursed to be born

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as trees, jamala and arjuna and, for their salvation, they had to wait for one hundred years until the coming of Krishna.

Kaliya ... Kalindi lake — Kaliya, a black cobra living in Kalindi lake, created a reign of terror, not allowing anyone to enter the lake. Krishna mounted its crest and danced on it with heavy thumps that forced it to surrender.

devoured the forest fire : When a fire broke out in Isika forest, endangering the lives of the cowherd boys and their cattle, Krishna asked his friends to shut their eyes for a while, during which he swallowed the forest fire.

Once Brahma ... retrieved : To witness Krishna's lila, Brahma made away with the cattle and some of his friends. To foil Brahma's trick, he produced them from his body.

Baruna ... Rescued — For taking bath in Kalindi in an inauspicious hour of the night, Nanda was imprisoned by Baruna, the God of the Waters. Krishna went to Baruna's abode and rescued Nanda.

Govardhan — A hill in Gopa which Krishna raised with his finger to protect the people of Gopa from the continuous rain and thunder caused by Indra, as a revenge for abandoning his worship.

Rasalila — Krishna's amorous dance with Radha and the gopis.

Akrura — Kamsa's minister and Krishna's maternal uncle; the word literally means one who is not cruel.

Narada — A sage born from Brahma's mind. He moves on a flail with a veena in his hand. While Kamsa was celebrating the marriage of Devaki and Basudeva, Narada told him that her eighth child would kill him.

Shakata — A demon who went to Gopa to kill Krishna, disguised as a bullock-cart. Before he could kill Krishna, who was sleeping under it, Krishna got up and kicked the bullock-cart, breaking it into pieces.

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Sandha and Truna	Followers of Kamsa, killed by Krishna.
Byoma	A demon who, disguised as a cowherd boy, once drove away Krishna's friends to a cave and confined them there. Krishna rescued them by killing Byoma.
Bachha	Disguised as a calf, Bachha mingled in the herd of cattle, grazed by Krishna and his friends. Krishna held his legs and hurled it round and round, then crashed him to death.
Kadamba	A cursed gandharva, killed by Balarama on the banks of Gomati.
Dhenuka	Kamsa's follower, killed by Balarama in the Tala forest.
jaba	Hibiscus

Canto II

Saphala's son	Akrura
Mathura	Derived from Madhu, father of the demon King Banasura whom Satrughna had killed. Since then it had been called Madhupura. Prior to that it was a colony of Arya Surasena dynasty. In Pali, it was Mathura.

The sign of a flag....... lotus-feet appeared

: Symbols of Vishnu, indicating purity and justice

Kama	The God of Love, literally means lust or sexual desire. He was Brahma's son who was burnt alive by Shiva for trying to disturb his meditation. Fearing that the creation will come to a halt without Kama, gods prayed to Shiva for his life. He was granted life, but not the body, for which he was called Atanu (One without body) or Ananga (One without limbs). Some of his other names are Mara, Kandarpa, Manasija, Madana, Pradyumna, Makaradhwaja, Minaketana and Darpaka. Rati is his wife, spring his friend, cuckoo his messenger,

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	fish, the sign on his flag and a bow and five flower-arrows (lotus, lily, niali, mango-bud and ashoka) his weapon.
Parijata	A heavenly flower
Rohini's son	Balarama
Yashoda's son	Krishna; Yashoda was his foster mother.

Canto III

Chitrakuta	In *Bhagavata*, Book VIII, Canto II. Chitrakuta is described as a mountain, eighty thousand miles in both length and height. Surrounded by the Milky Sea, this huge and beautiful mountain served as a resort for heavenly beings.
Brihaspati	Jupiter ; the teacher of gods in Hindu mythology.
Bidhi	The Creator; Brahma
Kshatriya	One of the four major castes in Hindu society, the other three being brahmin, vaishya and sudra.
lily	water-lily
you live so near	Gopa was eight kilometres from Mathura.
three worlds :	Heaven, the earth and the nether world.
Brahma, the eight-handed :	Brahma has four heads and eight hands.
sirisa flower ...... torrential rain :	The flower of a tree that exudes glue. It is too soft to bear the weight of dew.
Jarasandha	The demon king of Magadha. He was killed by Bhima, the second Pandava, in the Mahabharata War at Krishna's instruction.
Sura	A demon killed by Krishna
Chanura, Mustika, Shalya :	great warriors, followers of Kamsa.
Bow-festival	A ceremony in which a bow, symbolizing a king's authority and valour, is worshipped.

Canto IV

Narayana	Vishnu; here Krishna
our eyes	Rama and Krishna are like the eyes of the gopis.

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when the moon.... south-west
: Krishna is going to Mathura, located to the south-west of Gopa.

Chandramani — A semi-precious moon-stone; it is said that it is so deeply connected with the moon that it dissolves when moonlight falls on it.

Canto VI

Shyamaghana — Dark cloud, Krishna
Madhubhubana — Mathura
Balia — Balarama
Madhupura : Mathura

Mathura..... the same as Gopa
: Gopa symbolizes youth, joy and love whereas Mathura stands for oppression and misrule.

two fierce lions ... lionesses :
Krishna and Balarama imagined as lions, the cowherd boys as elephants and the gopis as lionesses.

Gopinath — The Lord of the gopis

Canto VII

One Bali .... many balis: On his way to Lanka, Ramachandra arrived at Kiskindhya. He killed Bali, the king of Kiskindhya and made his brother, Sugriba, the king.balis : girls / women

He was accompanied by a woman
: Sita went into exile with Ramachandra.

Krishna cannot ... acquire it :
The moon has one quality more than Krishna's. The moon bears marks of scandal on it. Krishna is now going to acquire such scandal.

Canto VIII

Chataka — A bird which cannot survive without rain

Canto IX

Krupasindhu — Ocean of Compassion, Krishna
Sudama — One of Krishna's dearest friends
Chakora — also Chakrabaka, who is said to be living on moon-light.

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Canto X

Sachi's consort	Indra, King of heaven
Sambarasura	A demon king killed by Kama for abducting his wife, Rati

Lord Jagannath.. Gundicha temple : The car festival

Churning the sea	In *Bhagavata*, Book VIII, CantoV-IX, it is described how gods and demons, in their search for nectar, churned the sea with Mandara mountain as the churner, the tortoise (Vishnu) as the pivot and Basuki snake as the rope.
the Wheel-bearer	Krishna
eight divine signs	lotus, conch, crocodile, tortoise, mukunda, kunda, nila, kharba
gandharvis	Demi-goddesses
Kinnara	half man and half god
Saraswati	The Goddess of Learning. A swan as her carrier, she sits on a lotus in the Milky Sea with a veena and pothi (books) in her hands.

Canto XII

sixty-four tactics	Methods of wrestling
adhana	How to save oneself from the strike of sword
tadana	How to strike the enemy
ulatapanchana	How to reverse the technique
muthabanchana	How to save oneself from blows

Canto XIII

Madhubana	A place in Mathura, the pleasure garden of Kamsa
Banamali	One wearing a garland of wild flowers, Krishna
heavenly elephants	Krishna imagined as Bamana, the dark-complexioned elephant of the South and Balarama, the fair-complexioned Airavata of the North.
Ugrasena	Kamsa's father, son of Surasena and Indumati's husband
Bairagi	One having no attachment with worldly things. The poet's original name was Bairagi Charan Pattanayak.

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Canto XIV

linga	phallus
bimba	A creeper; its fruit looks shining red when ripens
parrot and mynah	A symbol of completeness
raga	A group of notes accepted in a set pattern in ascent and descent, creating a tonality or mood within which improvisations can be made.
Kanhu	Krishna
Brahman	The ultimate reality, the principle underlying all creations
Yogi	A man proficient in yoga
gandharvas	demi-gods
Sama Veda	One of the four Vedas

Canto XVI

Rahu	The eighth planet of Hindu astrology, an evil omen
Rambha	A celestial damsel
middle of ..... digit four..	The digit four in Odia has a very slim middle

Canto XVII

Kaincha	A shrub having red and white berries; Kasa grass
Kamala's consort	Vishnu
Kadambari	an intoxicant

Canto XVIII

twelve suns	Kamsa was believed to possess the power of twelve suns

Canto XX

Chintamani	A wish-fulfilling stone, one of Krishna's names
Kumbhakara wasp	Also Kumbhara wasp ; a clay wasp, green and yellow in colour, having two wings and six feet. It kills a worm of green colour, takes it to its borrow which it seals with mud. After a few days the worm turns to a clay wasp and comes out breaking the seal.

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The wheel ..... crocodile of a woman's heart
: Lord Vishnu had sent his wheel to kill the crocodile and save the elephant from its grip.

The wheel ..... crocodile of a woman's heart
:Lord Vishnu had sent his wheel to kill the crocodile and save the elephant from its grip.

Pothi — A palm-leaf manuscript

dambaru — A country-made musical instrument, associated with Lord Shiva

Ganga, Gaya, Prayag, Kashi : holy places in India

Makara — The beginning day of the month of Magha (January-February) when the sun passes from the sign of Sagitarius to the sign of Capricorn.

Hara and Gouri — Shiva and Parvati

Canto XXI

Sripati — Lakshmi's consort, Vishnu, here Krishna

maya — Illusion

Kanasiri — a plant with beautiful flowers

Kaustuva — Once a king, meditating for years, lost his limbs one by one except his head. Pleased with his devotion, Vishnu turned his head into a gem, Kaustuva which he wore himself. (*Nrusingha Purana*)

Canto XXII

nirvana — extinction

Baiswanara — The God of Fire; Agni

Vidyadhara — A celestial being

tandaba — A terrible dance form performed by Shiva (Nataraj) which brings destruction.

Canto XXIII

Brutra — The fight between Indra and Brutra, the demon has been described in the Vedas.

He sent Putana to greet me : Krishna says it ironically as Putana was sent to kill him.

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Drumila's son.... delicate body	: 'delicate body' is used ironically
six of my brothers	The names of Krishna's six brothers whom Kamsa had killed are found in *Bhagavata*, as Kirtiman, Susena, Bhadrasen, Ruja, Bammardana and Bhadra.

Canto XXIV

Sumeru	The Meru mountain of mythological fame. It is also called Hemadri, Ratnasanu, Amaradri etc. It is eighty four thousand yojanas (one yojana=8 miles) in height, of which sixteen thousand yojanas are submerged. It has three mounts. It is described in *Bhagavata, Nrusingha Purana* and *Kurma Purana*. In modern geography it is the North Pole, located in the Arctic circle.
Uddhaba	Satyaka's son and Krishna's friend
yakshas	Custodians of the wealth of the dead.
rakshasas	demons

Canto XXV

Om	A sound syllable which symbolizes the infinite.
Sanaka	One of the first four sons born from Brahma's mind. The other three were Sanandana, Sanata and Sanatana.
ghee	clarified butter, butter oil.

Canto XXVI

Wood-apple	Kaintha (Odia); Kapitha (Sanskrit); a tropical fruit with a hard covering. An elephant consumes all its content without breaking it.
Kurari	A she-dove

Canto XXVII

six chakras	The body imagined as consisting of six circles or wheels : Muladhara, Swadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Bisudhaksha, Ajna.
four kinds of salvation	sarupya, salesakya, samipya, sajujya

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Mahua	The juice from the fruits of a mahua tree ; an intoxicant
Parama bird	Jiba and Parama are imagined as birds. Jiba represents the body in which Parama, symbolizing the Divine Spirit, exists.
brahmachari	One who practises continence and studies Vedas in the preceptor's house after investiture.
the hare ..... the moon	Mistaking that the moon has water in it, the thirsty hare jumped into it and died.
Cuckoos of Autumn	During autumn the cuckoo leaves the nest of the crow where it has been brought up.
in that direction	In the direction of Mathura

Canto XXVIII

Radha	Brusabhanu's daughter; wife of Chandrasena. She is the supreme devotee of Lord Krishna and his eternal consort. She is the embodiment of Krishna's internal spiritual energy of pleasure.
autumn moon	During autumn the moon looks the brightest.
Ketu	The ninth planet of Hindu astrology, an evil omen.
Khanjan	Wagtail bird, known for its roving eyes.
Padmini	The most beautiful and virtuous woman.
Sadhu	A Hindu holy man, especially one who lives apart from people and society.

Canto XXIX

Brusabhanu	Radha's father
lekhana	A pen made of iron, used in old times, to write on palm-leaves
like Agasti.... waters	During the war between gods and demons, the demons hid themselves in the ocean. To flush them out Agasti drank the whole ocean.

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Kumbha's son .... Vindhya mountain : Wishing to have Urvasi, a celestial damsel, Mitra (the sun) and Baruna performed a jajna in which they put their semen in a sacred pitcher (Kumbha). Agasti was born from it. He was the guru of Vindhya mountain. Vindhya wanted the sun to travel around it. When refused, it began to grow higher and higher to obstruct the movement of the sun. Agasti reached Vindhya who bowed to him. The sage asked him to remain like that until he came back. Agasti went to the south and never returned.

pictures of snakes.... Shiva : An ancient custom of sending a letter of love. As a snake eats air, the scent of the flowers will not go away. Seeing Hanuman, the sun will keep distance, so the flowers will not fade. Shiva has the moon on his head which will keep the flowers cool and fresh.

Canto XXX

Harekrishna Forms part of the Mahamantra of the Vaishavas. It is composed of thirty-two letters. Hare Krishna Hare KrishnaKrishna Krishna Hare Hare,Hare Rama Hare RamaRama Rama Hare Hare.

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ISBN978-81-920552-7-5

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